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THE CARTOONS OF
ST. MARK.

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TO THE READER.

I WILL not attempt an apology for publishing these unpolished pages—the extemporaneous utterances of the pulpit, reported by shorthand, and afterwards corrected, but not re-written; because, to the confusion of literary ambition, I have found that my books produced in this way seem to have been no less serviceable than those which I have carefully written. As my object is not literary distinction, but the service of souls in the ministry of the Gospel, I am well content that the earthen vessel should be employed, if only the treasure may be the better apprehended, and the Master more adequately praised.

An apology may, however, seem necessary for publishing another book on the Gospels, and especially on the easiest and plainest of them, St. Mark. But I have no apology to offer. The more portraits we can obtain of one we love, the better. Sometimes a poor painter will fetch out a trait which a great master has missed. Without putting this book into any competition with distinguished names, I am yet bound to say that there are some things here which I had not found in any book or

commentary within my reach—things coming out of the inexhaustible store, the Person of Jesus.

Exerceatur servus tuus in vitâ tuâ, was the prayer of à Kempis. And in that exercise is not only our delight, but the practical profit which avails up to the level of “each day’s most quiet need.” Without presumption, I may assure my reader that if he has read a hundred lives of Christ, or even if he has read the Gospel of Mark a hundred times, he will yet be the better for a re-perusal of the theme.

When we are speaking of a great person, the humblest attendant may advance a modest boast that, in introducing others to him, he has rendered a service, though unrecognised and contemned.

Students will observe my obligation to Wendt’s *Lehre Jesu*, especially in the rather unusual grouping of Chapter xii. 13—37 with ii. 1—iii. 6. But eager to produce a unity of impression, and to put the whole book into so compact a form that one serious sitting may suffice to read it, I have avoided quoting authorities or giving references.

And now I can only express the prayerful hope that some heavenly voice, such as that which fell on Augustine in the Garden of Milan, may reach the ear of a reader or two: *Tolle et lege*.

ROBERT F. HORTON.

HAMPSTEAD,

April, 1894.

PROEM.

“No,” thou sayest,
“My heart is all in ruins with pain, my feet
Tread a dry desert where there is no way
Nor water. I look back, and deep through Time
The old worlds come but faintly up the track,
Trodden by the sons of men. The Man *He* sent,
The Prince of Life, methinks I could have loved,
If I had looked once in His deep man’s eyes.
But long ago He died, and long ago
Is gone.”

He is not dead, He cannot go !
Men’s faith at first was like a mastering stream,
Like Jordan “the descender,” leaping down
Pure from his snow ; and warmed of tropic heat
Hiding himself in verdure ;—then at last
In a Dead Sea absorbed,—as faith of Doubt.
But yet the snow lies thick on Hermon’s breast,
And daily at his source the stream is born !—
Go up ! Go, mark the whiteness of the snow !
Thy faith is not thy Saviour, not thy God !
Though faith waste fruitless down a desert old,
The living God is new—and He is near !

JEAN INGELow.

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I.

THE CARTOON OF HEALING.

(MARK I.)

THE CARTOON OF HEALING.

THE famous Church of St. Mark at Venice is singular amongst mediæval churches in two respects. In the first place, the mosaics which cover it, wholly within and largely without, form, as it were, an illustrated Bible which speaks rather to the eye than to the ear; and, secondly, in this church Christ and the Cross take the place of pre-eminence, which elsewhere is occupied by Mary and the saints. "It is the Cross," says Ruskin, "that is first seen, and always, burning in the centre of the temple, and every dome and hollow of its roof has the figure of Christ in the utmost height of it, raised in power or returning in judgment."

Now, curiously enough, these two features of the great Church of St. Mark at Venice accurately reflect the two most striking characteristics of the Gospel which is called by

the name of Mark. This Gospel stands out among the four as the most picturesque—the one in which everything passes, as it were, before the eye. Its chapters are like the mosaics in the great church, or like the cartoons of a great painter, presenting the appearance and the actions of Christ. Further, this Gospel is so occupied with Christ alone, that the other figures which appear in the canvases of St. Matthew and St. Luke, Joseph and Mary, John the Baptist, the disciples, the groups of Jews—all sink into the background; they are mere suggestions; their portraits are not attempted. This Gospel is in literature the earliest, the simplest, the most direct, likeness of Jesus alone. The other Gospels have their distinguishing merits—each is invaluable—but for unity and completeness of impression, for life-like contact with the subject of the narrative, for immediate perception of our Lord as He would appear to the eyes of the men who knew him—to such eyes as Peter's, for example—during the brief period from the beginning of His public ministry to His premature death—for these purposes this second Gospel stands unique among our New Testament treasures.

Now, it is the belief of most thoughtful Christians that the religious need of to-day is to apprehend the historic Jesus, and to apprehend Him historically—to bring our problems to the resolution of His lips, and our troubles to the compassion of His heart; to correct our ideas, religious, political, and social, by the principles and forces which He exhibited; and, above all, to put again into His hands the Church which is still called by His name.

It is in this conviction and for the reason just suggested that I invite you to undertake a consecutive study of the Gospel according to St. Mark.

The first chapter is, very obviously, grouped in the following way: there is (i.) the commencement of the ministry of Jesus; then (ii.) the record of a specimen day in that ministry; and (iii.) the immediate impression produced by Him and His work.

I. First, as to *the commencement of the ministry*. In this Gospel the commencement is quite abrupt, like the beginning of the *Iliad*.* There is a word or two, and at once the Person is before us and the action begins. A few phrases

* *Festinat in medias res*, Horace says of Homer.

suffice to explain the appearance and the significance of John the Baptist, who is the communicating link between Jesus and the past, the last of the Old Testament prophets, as the people all recognised. He comes before us as one who has read the great prophecy of the Exile, and ventured to take a passage out of it as the keynote of his own life, declaring that he is simply a voice preparatory, crying in the wilderness. He comes living in the severe simplicity of the first great prophet Elijah, and preaching the great moral truths of the prophets of the eighth century before Christ. He commands at once the attention even of Jerusalem and its environs; and the fame of his preaching reaches the remote province of Galilee. The impression he makes is deep and wide, and when the multitude, awed by his enthusiasm, and conscience-struck by his faithfulness, is prepared to listen to any utterance which comes from his lips, he strenuously declares that he is there to speak of One that was coming, whose superiority to him was only to be measured by the vast difference between the Holy Spirit of God and the feeble element of water. And then, quite simply, Jesus

appeared among the crowd that was listening to the great preacher. Like the rest of them, He wished to be baptized in these waters of confession and repentance; but He was not like the rest of them. Great thoughts were working in His mind, and this scene at the River Jordan was to be the testing of them. A great purpose was in His heart, and this was to reveal it. The question had come to Him, What was His own nature, what was His mission in the world, what was the work He must do? And here was to be the answer. For, as in His complete humility He steps into the waters, and is submerged beneath their waves, and then climbs the bank and stands amongst the crowd baptized, there come to Him a Vision and a Voice which settle the question that was working in His mind. The vision is of the Holy Spirit coming down out of the rended heavens, and the Voice is the Voice of God speaking to Him, and telling Him that He is His beloved Son, in whom He is well pleased. Here was a stupendous revelation to the heart of a simple peasant from remote Galilee. Here was the implication, evidently, to His mind, that He was the long-promised Messiah, of whom He

had read in the ancient Scriptures—the Anointed One that was to be. The Spirit of the Lord had come upon Him.* With this inward discovery to digest and to master He was not unnaturally driven by the Spirit into solitude—the solitude of the desert of Judæa, where He might think and understand.

There, not unnaturally, nay, there necessarily, He met the tempter—tempted, we may surmise, first of all, to question the reality of the mysterious call; or, when that temptation was set aside, tempted to use the call for some personal and lower ends—to use the Divine powers which had broken in upon Him to serve a worldly purpose, to create a transient excitement, to make Him notable in the eyes of men. And in the strange society of wild beasts and angels, facing the extremities of possibility, He fought through the temptation, He recovered His balance, and issued prepared for His life's work.

II. Now, passing to the second feature of the chapter—the work He did was to proclaim a message of good news—the good news that the

* This seems to be St. Mark's answer to the moot question: When Jesus recognised first His Messiahship?

Kingdom of God was absolutely pressing down upon the world. He was surrendered to this task spirit and soul and body, and our Evangelist thinks it worth while at once to give us *a specimen day of the way in which He would discharge His task*, tracing the day from morning to morning. It is a Sabbath day at the little town of Capernaum, upon the Lake of Galilee. He goes into the synagogue with the rest of the people, in order to teach. He begins to teach, and what He said is not reported—it is not necessary to report it, for it was, as they all saw at once, a doctrine of deeds rather than of words, a new teaching, for it was “with power,” that is to say, it was joined with the practical work of healing the distraught, the deranged, the distressed. The Scribes were accustomed, in that place and in that pulpit, to conscientiously teach according to their light. They would take the venerable Scriptures and explain them, or comment on them, very much after the fashion of modern preaching. He took up the same Scriptures, but He taught not as if *they* were His authority, but as if He were *theirs*. He touched the forces narrated in the Scriptures

not merely with a reverent antiquarian interest, to explain to the people how, in the old time before them, God was strong and great, and wrought wonders amongst men; but, rather, with the living and practical purpose to loose them and set them at work in the Galilee, the Judæa of His own day and generation. So striking was this difference, that the sleepest listener immediately perceived it—the exclamation which was made even during the service was in effect, “You observe He is not using words, but spiritual forces; He is not addressing our intellects only, but He has got God behind Him, and He will have to be reckoned with.” This impression was immediately deepened by the effect produced upon a person in the audience—an excited person who appears to have been deranged. He, like many deranged people, was curiously susceptible to the occult powers that are working in the world, and he exclaimed at once, “That is the God speaking! That is the God speaking!” And the Teacher immediately exercised His authority, and with a word, with the command of the Spirit that was in Him, He reduced the excited person to reason and to peace.

When the service of the morning was over, He passed into the house of a young man whom He had selected to be among His immediate followers, and it chanced that one of the family was lying there grievously ill. The doctrine—the new doctrine—that had just been preached in the synagogue, must now be preached in the privacy, the unexciting privacy, of the home. The new doctrine works in the home as well as in public. He approaches the fevered woman and restores her to health. And immediately through the town was spread the strange tidings that He who had made such an impression in public was the same in private; and Peter's wife's mother, whom the people had known, and who was sick, had been raised to health again. Accordingly, as the heat of the day passed into the cool of the evening, the house was besieged by sufferers and the friends of sufferers, and it was necessary to go out into the street, and in the street to present the new doctrine once more—the new doctrine of practical help and healing and blessing—to the distressed humanity of Capernaum, which is but the type of the distressed humanity of the world. And

in that gracious ministry the night fell and the crowd dispersed, and all men went to their rest.

But long before night was ended the Chief Worker was up from His couch and out at the door, through the city that was wrapped in slumber, into the open country, to some solitary place, to pray. A day of such teaching, of such healing, of such blessing, cannot be lived without a close, continuous communion with God; and as He was the beloved Son of God, well pleasing to the Father, it was the more necessary that He should keep in contact with the Father. Common men can do, it appears, with very little prayer; bad men can do without communion at all; but the better we are the more communion we want, and the Son of God Himself reveals His Sonship first in this necessity of constant prayer. Sleep and rest are desirable, but much more necessary than sleep or rest is this exercise which is the breath of life, the impulse of all Divine and redemptive action in the world.

III. Finally, we wish to observe that *the impression made* on men by the Person so appearing, and so beginning to carry out His work,

was immediate and inevitable. First, you may notice the effect on these four young fishermen—young men, we may be sure, who had been well brought up, trained in the piety of their day, and sensitive, as young men are before they are spoiled, to the spiritual issues of life; anxious to make the most of the brief opportunities that are given. The effect upon them is very noticeable. There was that in Him, in His appearance, in His words, in His tone, which at once commanded their confidence; and the figurative promise, “I will make you to be fishers of men,” was fascinating to them. Better than catching fish is this, a larger horizon for our life,—we are to be fishers of men! The attraction of this appeal was stronger even than the love of father and home. Yes, and there are young men to-day, ordinary young men, who, when they become aware of Jesus appealing to them, and saying to them, “You, too, come and follow Me,” obey in just the same way, for the attraction is irresistible, the authority is obvious and immediate.

Then, observe the impression on these diseased and suffering people—leaving aside the vexed

question of demoniacal possession with simply this one remark, that the story proceeds as if such a phenomenon were quite a recognised and commonplace thing at the time—look rather at the leper described at the end of the chapter, an outcast who is condemned, of course, to go by the public ways, but forbidden to enter any private house, and this under penalty of death; obliged at every turn and at every meeting of a fellow-creature to cry out, “Room for the leper! Unclean!” and humanity shrinks away from him that he may pass through the parting walls alone. It had never occurred to him to speak to any human being yet, except in warning; but the immediate impression that Jesus makes upon him leads him to follow Him and cry, “I am quite sure that if you will you can make me clean. Do change the whole nature of my life, and the sound of my bitter cry, that I may go into the world saying *Clean!* instead of *Unclean!*” What I ask you to observe is the immediate confidence which is produced by His presence upon those who are suffering and wretched. It is an easy thing to cure those who believe, but it is the greatest task in all the world to get any one to believe;

and the peculiar feature about Him is that where He goes faith springs up before Him, and the effect of His presence is the opening of the doors of God to the injured and diseased bodies of men.

The fame of these things, as is natural, and the influence of so remarkable a personality, soon spread beyond the circle of immediate disciples, and the little group of those who were healed. It went all through the district, and here we see Him trying to evade the excited interest which had been aroused. He tells the healed people to keep silence. "Do not speak about Me," He says. When the multitude finds Him out in the solitary place, and He sees them coming, He hastens into another district. The truth is, He is bent on delivering His new doctrine, the doctrine of practical healing and blessing to the world, because that is the very essence of the Kingdom of God, which He has come to proclaim; but He is equally bent on avoiding the vulgar appeal to the love of the marvellous, which is one of the lowest elements in human nature. He wants none of the stupid notoriety for miracle, He wants no one to believe in Him because the

powers of God are healing men ; He wants to heal men because they believe in Him. And therefore you have this singular fact, obvious even in this first chapter, and more obvious as we proceed, that He is trying, as it were, to avoid popularity. Moved with compassion as He is by every cry of personal need, reaching out His hand to every helpless creature that is presented to Him, eager to help, bent on curing, He does not want to attract public attention. What He prefers is obscurity, what he would choose is the quiet of thought and of prayer. He would see life steadily and see it whole ; not in the wild phantasmagoria of public excitement, with enthusiasm and adulation on the one side, and detraction and scorn on the other. He would be alone, and would seek the desert places in order to be alone. He does not want the praise of men, He does not want the wonder of men, He does not want the compulsory submission of men ; He wants to save them, and He wants their heart yielded to Him because He saves.

We see, then, this Divine Messenger, with all His lofty convictions coming straight from God, with all His wide sympathies reaching

out to men, with all the gracious powers entrusted to Him for healing and blessing the creatures around Him; yet simple, retiring, unexcited, above all things bent on evading popularity, and gathering about Him just three or four young men whose ingenuous minds and ready piety will prepare them to receive His instruction, and to become the pioneers of the Kingdom of God in the world. This forms the first cartoon in the Gospel of St. Mark.

II.

THE CARTOON OF FORGIVENESS.

(MARK II. 1—22.)

THE CARTOON OF FORGIVENESS.

IF the first chapter of St. Mark can be described as *The Cartoon of Healing*, the first twenty-two verses of the next chapter may be described as *The Cartoon of Forgiveness*. It exhibits the Son of Man among men, declaring in a very quiet and unostentatious way, as if it were a matter of course to Him, that He has "power on earth to forgive sins"—a function, of course, which, the religious people very properly observed, belongs to God alone. It exhibits Him, then, entering into the society of those who were held to be sinners in an exceptional degree, apparently with the purpose of conveying to them by personal contact the fact of this forgiveness. And thus it shows how conscious He was Himself that His word and His message and His work were a new departure in the world, involving a break with all

the past religious ideas, and more especially with all the religious forms, of men. The originality of His work is illustrated by two very striking, though very homely, similes.

The grouping of these incidents is very simple, and if the reader will bear in mind that the whole passage is the Cartoon of Forgiveness, he can follow with close attention the several details that are narrated.

I. First of all, we are told that Jesus comes back from the wilds of the country, where He had sought a little solitude and quiet, into the city of Capernaum. And immediately the news is spread that He is once more at the house of Simon. The house is besieged by a great multitude of people, who crowd into the courtyard and fill it—people who have already seen the power of the new vitalising doctrine on suffering, and are now to see its power upon sin, for sin is the great reality of which suffering is simply the transitory shadow. And as He speaks to the people in the courtyard, with a little breathing space left between Him and His hearers, the roof of the verandah under which He stands is opened, and a man is let down upon a couch, a man so helpless

that he could not move either hands or feet—a paralytic; he lies at the feet of the Teacher, dumb and motionless. Nothing is said about the man's character, or about his previous life, the cause of his illness, and so on. But there comes before my mind a fact to which my attention was called some years ago of a young man, barely twenty-one, lying in precisely the condition that is here described, unable to move a limb, the result simply of his youthful debaucheries. And one would gather, from the unexpected course which Jesus pursues with this young man, that He suspected a similar cause in this case of illness which was before Him. He says nothing about healing; it seems as if He is peering through the outward to see the inward, and is putting His finger upon the spring of the mischief. It is as if He is arguing, "It is not God's purpose that any young man should lie paralysed; there is sin somewhere"; and His sensitive spirit surmises the cause. Now if that is the true connection of this narrative, the words He spoke are simply the most wonderful revelation which was ever given to the world. If you or I had seen a person in that condition we should

have begun to moralise ; we should have said, "Yes ! suffering of this kind is the natural and just result of sin of that kind." We should have expected the man to make a full confession and express his penitence. Jesus—Jesus the Lord—simply announces His recognition of the fact that sin was the cause, by uttering this marvellous assurance. "Child," He says, looking down at him—and from the word "child" we may perhaps gather that the sufferer was still a young man—"child," He says, "thy sins are forgiven thee." How wholly unexpected that ! The religious persons present were scandalised. But, before we condemn them, shall we not consider how scandalised we ourselves, we religious people, should have been ? Some of us would have wished to impose upon the man the penances of the Church, to exact a formal confession, to adduce the waters of baptism. Others of us, equally religious, would have wished to make quite clear the doctrine which we believe to be the secret of the Atonement ; we should have dwelt upon the substitutionary offering of Jesus, and then we should have required the sufferer to accept this "scheme of salvation" before we could speak

to Him about pardon. For, as we should perhaps mean, if we did not say, "It is not faith in Jesus that saves men, but it is faith in the Atonement that saves them." How dangerous we should have called this doctrine. The method of Jesus is simply to announce to the man, before he speaks a word of confession, of penitence, or of appeal, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." It seems as if He meant to imply that His purpose in the world was to declare that a broad and sufficient rescript of pardon underlies all human life, waits for every human soul, so that each may take it immediately, freely, unconditionally, directly he has the courage to believe it, or, let us say, the common-sense to accept it. It is an amazing revelation. Of course the world flatly disbelieves it, but there it is. He stands there, His words are recorded, His action is depicted, in order that we may see that the luminous meaning of His presence in the world is precisely this incredible, this transcendental truth, that the forgiveness of God underlies the whole of humanity.

I have referred to the difference between religious people and Jesus, extenuating the Jews, because it is the custom of the Christian

Church to dwell upon the enormities of the Jewish people without ever observing that each enormity of Judaism is repeated and maintained in the Church that is called by the name of Jesus. And it is the very essence of life for us that we should recognise the difference between us and Jesus. There is no saving of the Church while it believes that it is what its Lord meant. The day of salvation dawns when we observe how far we are from understanding what He meant and said and did. As it came to a poet in our own day—a vision just for a moment:—

There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.

But we make His love too narrow
By false limits of our own,
And we magnify His strictness
With a zeal He will not own.

II. But, passing to the second panel in this picture, you observe that Jesus is quite serious in His view of the situation, and He shows it

practically by going at once into *the society of certain vicious people*, such people as may always be found in large numbers among any long-shore population. His intention in going there is manifested by a very striking act. In the first cartoon we saw Him calling to be His followers four pious and reputable young men ; but, in this cartoon, we find Him deliberately calling to be His follower a disreputable and, presumably, an irreligious person, Levi, the son of Alphæus, a publican. That act is the explanation of His presence amongst the people of this kind. He sits down with many publicans and sinners to a meal. It is a curious spectacle, and I do not quite see how we can present a parallel in modern religion. We can parallel the publicans, a class of men to whom it has become the custom to attribute a great deal more iniquity than probably was their share. These fiscal agents of the Roman Government were, no doubt, people somewhat insensible to national honour, and they were, no doubt, people not over-scrupulous in the accumulation of their wealth. But we can, I think, find parallels to a religious teacher sitting down to meat with people of that kind.

We are not astonished if a clergyman dines with someone who, on the Stock Exchange, has accumulated a fortune by very questionable methods. We are not at all astonished if such a teacher visits the house of a man who has become rich, and prosperous, and honoured, by owning the public-houses which are working the most deadly havoc upon the souls and bodies of our fellow-men. The presence of Jesus with these publicans, or fiscal agents of the Roman Government, would not, perhaps, cause us any great astonishment; and the astonishment of the Jews might be attributed to their national sentiment rather than to any sense of outraged religion. But the mention of "sinners" in a Jewish document is quite another matter. The term in Jewish literature means the people who had broken away from the law of Moses, and had thrown off all religious restraints; and the New Testament leaves us in no question as to the character of the people described. They are the *canaille* of the city; they are the men who, like the paralytic brought to Jesus in the house, are simply soul-sick with vice. They are the women who are earning their living by the shameful trade of

lust. The New Testament is perfectly explicit as to the character of these people. I suppose it would not have created a scandal if He had gone amongst them in the same way that Isaiah once went, to denounce the drunkards of his day, and the gay daughters of Jerusalem.* Nor should we ourselves be scandalised if the visit were paid with tracts and a Bible to read to them, to exhort them, and to improve them. But what was so utterly scandalous to the Jews, and what is so utterly scandalous to the Church of to-day, is that He went among them with a sense of social equality, without reproach, without rebuke, not to revile, but to sit at their board. And, when some one had an objection to bring against Him, He was prepared with an answer altogether beyond their apprehension—that he was there on the same principle that a doctor must go amongst the sick, cannot prescribe for them sitting at home, must be amongst them with a tender sympathy, with a kind and genial insight, trying to penetrate to the cause of the disease. He sat at the table with them and conversed with them that He might understand them. And the

* Is. xxviii. 7, &c., xxxii. 9, &c.

Jewish world could not see, as the Christian Church does not see, how He can save the world by "becoming sin" for it. He had come, as He said frankly, to call sinners.

Some months ago, in Camden Town, a city missionary saw seated on a public-house doorstep three young women, and his heart was moved with pity for them. He went and spoke to them, and they met him with impudent and shameless derision. But undismayed, he said to them, "I have four daughters of my own, you see; and perhaps some missionary may some day want to speak to them." And they said, "Then are they bad girls like us?" And he answered, "Oh, they are by no means perfect." And he turned to them and asked them if they were not weary of the ways of sin. That evening they were all penitent, weeping for their dismal past, and to-day they are rescued and saved. That man "receiveth sinners."

III. Finally, glance at these remaining verses which remind us that this new doctrine of free and immediate pardon is necessarily a break with the religious ideas of the ancient Judaism. I think we may say that it is not

altogether a break with the deeper teaching of the Prophets and the Psalmists, for that deeper teaching was indeed a constant prophecy of the coming Christ. But the Torah, the Law, which was the religious book of Judaism, *par excellence*, certainly taught, and teaches, that, while for sins of inadvertence, certain sacrifices may be offered, according to the prescribed ritual, all deliberate sins, all wilful sins, are unpardonable, and "the soul that sinneth it shall die," and "shall be cut off from amongst its people." This new theology of the Kingdom of God, which the Lord had come to exhibit, could by no possibility be fitted into that ancient framework. As He says, to attempt to do so will be like putting a piece of strong, unfulled cloth upon an outworn garment; it will not mend the garment, it will only tear it. This new doctrine is like a strong ferment, freshening, gladdening wherever it goes, but you cannot possibly pour it into the—what word can you use?—into the churchiness of Judaism, that will not hold it. It may possibly break up the churchiness of Judaism, but it is possible that in the breaking the new wine will be spilled. "I,

therefore," says He, "I will never put it in; I shall have new bottles for my new wine. The penance and the feasting of the old dispensation; the whole system of calculated balance for sin—so much payment for so much sin, and then a clean bill and the acquittal, I have done with it for ever. Into that system you cannot pour the new wine of the Kingdom. I have come with the large pardon of God, with the love of God towards sinful men and women; and into that old worn bottle this new wine cannot and shall not be poured; or, if it is, it will break the old bottle and the wine will be spilled." And that is precisely what has happened. How true He is! The outworn system sprang up again, the old leathern bottle demanded that the wine should be put in it, and in another form the Judaism that He denounced, with which He broke, became Christianity; and all the old ideas and the old methods were gradually foisted back upon the Kingdom of God and the Church of the Redeemer. And, in consequence, to this day, we can hardly read this initial act of the pardon of Jesus without a lurking suspicion that He was not orthodox; that

He was not doing what we should have done; was not propounding the system that we should have presented, because here He was offering pardon to the sinner immediately, fully and freely. And yet the world cannot be saved until we understand Jesus. His method is the only method that can move to penitence, to confession, and to change. You will not call this sinner here to repentance by telling him what a sinner he is; but meet him with "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and his heart is broken. "Oh! my Lord and my God," he cries, "that thou shouldst pardon me thus!" You say "Perhaps! but there are some human beings who will abuse such an offer, and because grace abounds they will fall into fresh sin, and they will treasure up wrath for themselves by sinning in the expectation of pardon." Yes! I suppose there are some human beings of that description; but, frankly, we have very little reason to say so. So rare is it to even try the method of Jesus. And I say it very sadly that if there are such human beings, a person who remains entirely unmoved and unchanged by the free pardon, the abounding compassion and love of God, is incorrigible. You cannot

change him by some other method; you will not find a stronger appeal. Where that fails, everything fails. When the pardoning love does not change a man's heart, that heart cannot be changed.

There, then, He stands, God—the Son of God—so simple, so natural, so human, but the Son of God, remember; He knew our sins and forgave them, with a heart that breaks for human misery, and a tenderness in touching the needs of men such as few of us have ever dreamt of; with a pardon simple, free, uttered at once for each of us; believing, He alone amongst those who have trodden the earth, He alone believing that the pardon of God is as wide as the world, and that directly a man believes it he is saved.

And that is the second cartoon of the Gospel according to St. Mark.

III.

"THE OLD LAW YIELDING PLACE TO THE NEW."

(MARK II. 23—28; XII. 13—37.)

“THE OLD LAW YIELDING PLACE TO THE NEW.”

STUDYING *the Cartoon of Forgiveness* we saw that the new wine of the kingdom could not be poured into the old bottle of the Law. Now, if we combine two passages—Mark ii. 23—iii. 6 and Mark xii. 13—37—passages which are obviously connected in a close and necessary relation, we get a very striking picture, drawn with St. Mark's peculiar vividness, of the precise attitude of our Lord to the Jewish system, and the representatives of it, in whose midst He had to live. The portraits of the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees, what they thought and what they taught, can have, of course, for us only an antiquarian interest, but they serve to show the personality of our Saviour in a most remarkable light. Their disputes with Him elicit bright and burning truths which are as valid and vital to-day

as they were then. Just consider what this means. In a passing controversy with these, the narrowest, the most pedantic of religious people, He utters rapidly three truths which burn like stars of the first magnitude in the dark vault of that distant time, and illumine this age no less than that. These parties, contentious and divided, these religious dignitaries of the ancient people, have met their Master here. Their legality, their piety, their law, their logic, serve only, much against their will, as a foil to set Him off. They ring His person with their dark and tortuous methods, but they are like so many shades around the light, showing how the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness comprehends it not.

We have here, as it were, a chiaroscuro after the manner of Rembrandt. The sunshine of grace and truth falls on the person of Jesus, and these men—types of mankind before, and types of mankind since—sink into the circumambient gloom around Him. Nor could Rembrandt with all his skill have shown us the central figure more nobly than this simple evangelist, St. Mark, has done, following his own truthful and unpretentious plan.

Now let us glance round at these parties that encircle our Lord—Pharisees, Herodians, and Sadducees—then let us linger for awhile with that Scribe who spoke discreetly, while we perceive the whole circle, answered with consummate wisdom, growing silent and bitter, resolving to ruin the One who discomfited them with the quiet arrows of truth, the long shafts of light from Heaven. It is a most instructive and solemnising picture.

I. First of all, we look at *the Pharisees*. The bulwark of Judaism—and by Judaism I mean the religion which was established on the return from captivity, as you may gather from the Book of Nehemiah—was the observance of the Sabbath. The law—the book of the Law—said a good deal about it, but the doctors of the Law said a good deal more. With that curious facility that unspiritual minds have for dwelling on the ceremonial rather than on the ethical side of religion, the custodians of the Law had insisted upon defining more and more stringently the obligations of the Sabbath day. There are many examples of this in the Talmud. In one of them we are told that it is breaking the Sabbath if, when you have lumbago, you

rub your limbs with vinegar and oil; it is breaking the Sabbath if, when you have a toothache, you rinse your mouth with vinegar, or if with a sore throat you gargle with oil, unless you swallow the lotions, in which case they become food, and a breach of the Sabbath is avoided. In this spirit the operation of threshing corn by taking the ears in the hand and pressing out the corn would be a breach of the Sabbath, or to take any steps to cure an atrophied limb would be to break the Sabbath. Now, will you observe that Jesus Christ, in quietly ignoring all these regulations, regulations which, remember, were popularly explained as the very Word of God, showed the highest form of courage, a courage which you can only appreciate when you have apprehended the character of Eastern fanaticism. For a prophet or a religious teacher to denounce irreligion is always easy, because of course he enlists the religious people on his side, but the difficulty is when he has to resist what is generally held to be religion, for then the religious people have only to bring against him a charge of heresy, of infidelity, of blasphemy, and the irreligious people will join the hue and

cry, glad for once to be on the side of religion in a case so congenial to their own tastes. It is almost impossible to get an illustration to-day which sufficiently exhibits the sublime courage of the Lord in breaking the regulations of the Sabbath in His day. I know no closer illustration than the shock which was produced in the minds of a great many religious people, a few years ago, when a certain notorious Member of Parliament declined the oath in the House of Commons. Depend upon it, the Pharisees were as sincere in condemning the Lord for breach of the Sabbath as these good people were in the course they took. But courage is not all. It is only a human virtue. We may be courageous without truth, and, indeed, human courage is largely expended in propping lies. Where Jesus shines out in unapproachable lustre is not simply in the courage He shows, but in the brilliant assertion which, at a stroke, revolutionised the whole conception of that hoary institution of the Sabbath, and revolutionises other religious institutions to-day as well: "The Sabbath is made for man, and not man for the Sabbath." The appeal to David and the shewbread is, of course, merely

an argument adapted to the people to whom He spoke; it is answering fools according to their folly. It is shutting the mouth of legalists who could only thus be met. But the great principle—"the Sabbath made for man, not man for the Sabbath"—carries these men and us, if we will only let it, to a height far above Sinai; and most noticeable of all is the manner and spirit in which Jesus Christ asserts the principle and condemns the opposition. Lover of men as He is, He is sternly angry with these men.

Oh! sacred passion of anger! Oh! wrathful grief with those who—calling on the name of God—would make religion an obstacle to helping and blessing and healing a fellow-creature, which is what God means by religion!

It is a solemn thought, indeed, that all religions, their theories, and their practice, are to be brought to this tribunal. The Sabbath, the Church, the Creed, the Bible—they were all made for man, and not man for them; and woe to the religion that bends man to them, instead of bringing them to the succour of man.

II. But we must pass to the argument or the question of *the Herodians*—the men who stood about the Court of Herod, and supposed themselves to represent the national patriotism of their country. They were prepared to flatter and to cajole the Son of Man because their purpose was to exploit Christianity. They meant to bring it to serve their own purposes and to maintain their own petty kingships of Herod and what not. There was great ingenuity, certainly, in the question which they put; nothing could well show a keener intellect. Supposing they could get Jesus to declare against the Roman suzerainty, then they could, at their discretion, either use Him to foment rebellion or use the Roman government to crush Him. If, on the other hand, they could get Him to approve of the tribute, they had a fine charge to bring against Him in the ear of the people: "A pretty leader and Messiah for you is this one who counsels submission to the Roman government." Nothing could be more ingenious than the question, nothing more significant than the Master's answer to it. He eludes the question. He eludes it not in any diplomatic sense; He eludes it on

principle. What is the principle on which He eludes it? It is this. The Kingdom of God sides with no form of government, with no social class, with no party. It moves in another sphere altogether. In vain will you try to pin it to monarchy or republicanism; in vain will you try to use it as a sanction for Conservatives or Liberals; in vain will you seek to fashion from it a weapon for Capital or for Labour; it will be no man's badge, because it is destined to be the banner of all men. The burning question which He propounds, the question of the Kingdom of God all along is this: "What is due to God? What tribute, annual, weekly, daily, is due to God?" There is the question from the lips of Jesus Christ. And while we are bent on answering that question, and settling our lives in conformity to that principle, we are able to live in the State as He Himself lived, accepting political conditions loyally, and yet, with the true spirit of the heavenly revolutionist, planting in the midst of the society where we live those eternal principles, those germinating thoughts which are destined to revolutionise human society. He, our Sovereign, has no sympathy

with those who elect to promote the Kingdom of God by red-handed change; He discountenances with His clear sight revolutions which brandish the name of Liberty in order to cover the ambition of their leaders. But at the same time He brings into the world seeds which germinate and grow; and in these quiet seeds is contained the secret of all successful societies, the principle of all sound governments, the one condition on which the evils that we deplore to-day can be removed, or, at least, greatly mitigated. "Render unto Cæsar that paltry drachma on which his head is stamped, and render unto God the things that are God's."

We are told that the men marvelled at His answer, and we marvel much more, for here in one brief sentence He has condemned beforehand all the crimes that have been perpetrated in His name, and has thrown His searching light down all the pages of subsequent history; has repudiated beforehand the action of His nominal Church, and has uttered His final condemnation of those who have sought to identify the Kingdom of God with some system of their own, and to

invoke His authority to support their own personal claims. "To God the things that are God's." And what is not God's? Where is Cæsar's share when God's share has been paid? There is a deep and searching question with which to face all the problems of human life.

III. But now we glance for a moment at the question of *the Sadducees*, if you can read it without a smile, for they make themselves ridiculous in history by the absurdity of the case they posit. Some of us have been disappointed with the answer which the Lord gave to them, forgetting that the *argumentum ad hominem* is often the only argument that convinces. The *best* argument is not always the best for the purpose, and when arguing with the Sadducees you must argue with Saddusaic logic. You have to remember that the Sadducees took the Pentateuch as their sole Scripture. And certainly we could so far agree with them that if they could not see the inspiration of the prophets and psalmists, and confined themselves to the Law, they were justified in denying the Resurrection. There is nothing in the Pentateuch to prove it. The

Pharisees themselves were sorely perplexed with that problem, and their attempts to prove the Resurrection from the Pentateuch have become a by-word and a laughing-stock. For instance, it says in Deuteronomy, "Moses sang this song," and the verb is in the future tense instead of in the present or the past; from which they argued that he would sing it in another world. Or, to take an even more absurd instance, in the second chapter of Genesis, the 7th and 19th verses, one word is used for "God formed man" and "God formed the beasts of the field," but it chanced, by an error of the current Hebrew manuscripts, that in the 7th verse the initial letter was repeated,* from which they argued that God formed man twice—once in creation and again in resurrection, while He formed the beasts once only, because the letter occurred but once. When you realise the network of absurdity, of verbal quibbling, of legal chicanery, with which religion was bound up in the day of our Lord, you will not think so meanly of His answer. It was a striking change from the petty literalism of the day to a broad liberalism; in answer to their

* יצר in v. 7; יצר in v. 19.

subtle casuistry he gives them an argument true for all time.

Has it occurred to us what it implied, what a reach of Divine thought it opens up? It implied that the relation between God and those who are permitted to trust Him and to love Him is so real, so vital, so tender, that their immortality is guaranteed by His. To use the argument of the beasts and the man from the second chapter of Genesis, God is the Creator of the beasts, the Creator also of the man, so far as He is beast or animal; but He is the God of those who trust Him, He is the God of those who love Him. Never the God of the beast! Never the God of the animal! Impossible that! But the God of the man, and when He becomes the God of the man, the man shares His Divine nature, and can no longer breathe the word annihilation. In God is immortality, and in man, too, as man is in God.

Now there was one Scribe in that company that was wise enough to see the wisdom of these Divine answers. And he put a question—one of the wisest questions that was ever put to a religious teacher. He wanted to know which among the four hundred commandments

of the Law must be taken as the salient one, the principal one, the guide, as it were, to the interpretation of the rest. The worst of the Jewish method was that it put the whole of the Law on precisely the same level of Divine inspiration and authority. It attached to every ceremonial trifle exactly the same weight as to the most momentous matters of goodness, of faith, and of worship. There is no better way of destroying a truth than to fasten it up with a number of half-truths, and then to insist on an indiscriminating veneration for the whole amalgam because the truth is there. When your enemy cannot prevent your building upon the rock, he will try to make you extend the building to the adjacent sand, so that when the sand shifts and the part of the building upon it gives way, if possible the walls on the rock may also be cracked by the ruin. Now, that is the method of the Bibliolater. It is the evil of every system of religion which exalts the letter, so that discrimination vanishes. Every detail, however worthless or trifling, is raised to the dignity of the highest truths. And this Scribe might well be singled out as on the very threshold of the Kingdom of God, because he

saw that you cannot make the four hundred precepts of the Law equally binding, but you want a principle, you want a truth which will interpret, you want a commandment which is authoritative, simple, and clear; and he says, "Which, Master, is that commandment?" And the Master's answer is the most wonderful answer He ever gave to any question. "Deuteronomy vi. 5, Leviticus xix. 18," He replies without hesitation. He has no doubt about it. He never supposed that the Law was divine in the sense that every part of it was equally authoritative with its centre. No! He takes up the very core—this commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul and with all thy strength, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." There is the Law and the Prophets summed up for you. When Jesus Christ gave that answer to the Scribe He revolutionised the ancient Law, and He saved it. This one Scribe who elicited the great answer and at once adopted it was immediately proclaimed to be "not far from the Kingdom of Heaven."

And now the picture is completed by a question which He Himself put to His

questioners—a searching question which they could not answer, a question which reduced them to silence, as well it might. It revealed the inadequacy of their religious ideas and the blindness of their heart. The Christ whom they expected was another David—a king sitting on a throne, with conquering arms to subdue the world. The Christ whom God intended was not David because he was greater than David, and the point that is brought out to these obstinate Scripture readers who never understood what they read is this—"the very Law on which you base your doctrine contains the proof of my own high origin." I ask you to reflect what was the consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth when He used this argument? What does it imply of His own sense of His person, His origin, His authority, His mission? He stands there in the group of religious people of His day, hemmed in by their subtle and tortuous ways; the light shines upon Him; how simple He looks. He is a peasant from despised Nazareth, uncultured, unrecognised; and yet, in His Divine humility, He looks down at the regal lineage of David far beneath His feet. David is the greatest name in Israel,

and, behold! a greater than David is here. No one can read the argument carefully without observing that it is the Lord's simple claim to be the Divine being in human flesh and blood. And in this Cartoon he stands before us conscious of His own Divinity.

IV.

THE FIRST CHURCH.

(MARK III. 7—35.)

THE FIRST CHURCH.

THIS Cartoon, you may observe, after the manner of Raphael's famous picture of "The Transfiguration," in the Vatican Gallery at Rome, combines two scenes in one—the scene on the mountain-top, and the scene in the house; but the leading thought of it all is *the formation of the first Christian Society or Church*. The picture presents us with a vast throng of human figures. The fame of Jesus had spread, and the people who crowded the seashore of Capernaum had come not only from the town but from all the district of Galilee, and even from the borders of the Mediterranean, the towns of Phœnicia, Tyre, and Sidon; from the south, too, they had come, out of Judea and Jerusalem; especially the religious leaders of the people, who felt it their duty to be present and inspect so great a religious movement.

From further even than Jerusalem they had come — from the great desert south of Jerusalem, a distance of 130 miles, involving a laborious journey of a week, the people had come to see and to hear the great Prophet whose fame had gone abroad.

We might have observed in the last Cartoon that while the religious people, the religious leaders, were seeking to entrap Him, the great crowd—to use St. Mark's expression—the great crowd listened to Him gladly (Mark xii. 37). This extraordinary popularity was not at all to the taste of Jesus. Bent on getting at men, He was well aware that crowds are often the great hindrance to individual work. It was impossible for Him to explain the nature of the Kingdom of God to vast masses of indiscriminate hearers. Their presence rendered it necessary for Him to speak in parables. He therefore seeks the mountain-top and the house as a refuge from the multitude. He retreats that He may select and consolidate. You will observe at once that He is not withdrawing from men, but, more strictly speaking, he is withdrawing men to Himself.

I. First, let us follow Him to this hill-top

behind the town of Capernaum. The time has evidently come when He must organise at least a small society—a society dedicated to the realisation of the Kingdom of God. He calls out and up to Himself a little company of men. Whether His clear voice rang out from the hill-top to the people on the beach, or He sent a messenger to one after another as He chose, we are not told; but He summoned up the hill to Himself a little handful of men. Why are they so few? For evidently they are not chosen to-day in order to be great Viziers or Satraps of the Kingdom, according to the popular impression of the first disciples or apostles of Jesus; they are chosen, as we are expressly told, for quite another purpose—for companionship; for attendance, to announce Him; for service, to cast out demons. Evidently they are not an order in the Church, but they are at this primitive stage the whole Church itself. There are only twelve of them. Why are they so few? Why is the number twelve? It is not necessary to seek a fanciful explanation of that number. The simple reason why they are so few, and why the number is twelve, is that they, in all that vast multitude, they alone had

even the semblance of a faith in Him which would justify their selection. I look over this first church-roll with curiosity and admiration. Five of them we have already met—Andrew and Simon, James and John and Matthew were personally summoned at the beginning. Half of them—six in number—begin and end in complete obscurity: you cannot paint their features on the canvas. Of some of them even the garrulity of tradition has not ventured to give a single deed or saying. Bartholomew, James of Alphæus, Thaddæus, and Simon the Cananæan, are simply names, and not even definite names, for the lists are given differently in different Gospels. The burning light of the Apostolic age falls upon the first church that was formed, and shows that half the number were mere ciphers. Only three of the twelve attained any distinction, or even distinctness—Peter, who is forthwith named Rock; James and John, who are surnamed the Sons of Thunder—a Rock apparently signally unstable, thunder apt to be mere irrelevant noise or worse, proposing to bring down wrathful lightning for conviction to lukewarm hearers. And the twelfth wins

all his notoriety from the exceptional fact of his being a traitor. These were the best—not the best only, they were the sole followers whom He could call to be with Him, to announce Him, to cast out demons; and of them He makes His Church.

II. But, secondly, let us follow Him into the house, and, as you will observe, the margin reads, “He cometh home,” a very appropriate expression. From the mountain-top of selection He comes into the house of consolidation. His Church is a new household, a new family, a family which, as an incident that immediately happened shows, was to take precedence of even our beloved earthly kinships. There came to Him, while He was in the house, and thronged with the people, His own mother and His brothers. They wished to see Him; and He wished to see them, beyond a doubt, but He took the opportunity to explain to the people that there was for Him a new test of relationship, a new basis of a family, which will widen while it excludes. The new household is to be based upon the desire to do the will of God. Those who are doing *the will* must be members of that household, and those

who are not doing *the will* can by no human or heavenly device be brought into the family. Those who have accepted His will, instead of their own, discover that a subtle tie unites them to one another. They are people of one will, because it is God's will; they are people of one mind, because it is the mind of Christ; and He is there, as it were, the brother in the household. Mother and sister and brother come to cluster round Him, and drawn by the magic tie, held by the indissoluble bond—the will of God—in this world and the next—His Church is from the very first a family, a household. It is from the very first based upon the solid Rock of the Will of God; it is from the very first a heavenly relationship between man and man, close as brother or sister, to sister or brother; a dearness, a tenderness, suffuses the whole society, they are all one with the Father because they all will to do the Father's will.

III. But, thirdly, while the new spiritual relationships which we now call the Church were being formed, and the new society was being established on its basis, two little incidents showed how entirely inadequate the old relationships had been to form any society that was

trustworthy and eternal. For His friends, those who came from home, those who had formed His household hitherto, the people who knew Him best, or would have said they knew Him best, were entirely bewildered by all His conduct, His teaching and the results. They came from their own house to this other house to lay hands on Him. They said to one another as they came, "He appears to be in a kind of ecstasy.* He is hardly responsible. For decency's sake, we must get Him home; for His own sake, we must put Him under control." This opinion of theirs is valuable to us, and the curious expression they used, which has been reported in effect, is valuable to us, because it gives us a glimpse of Him as He looked just at that time—"He is in ecstasy," they say. There was upon His face that exalted, that inspired expression which comes from a very intimate communion with God, and always seems to unspiritual people to be a sign of madness. They thought Him mad. Now, what one would say in following the words and deeds already recorded in this Gospel concerning Him would be that they show in Him a quite peculiar sanity,

* ἔλεγον γὰρ ὅτι ἐξέστη. (Mark iii. 21.)


a balance which is perfect. So far as we have seen Him hitherto, we should say, "He is so strikingly, so singularly Himself! Beside Himself? No! There is no element of distraction; no element of fanaticism, no touch of frenzy in Him." But they judge by themselves. After all, the word "mad" is easily defined. We call anyone mad whom we cannot understand, and, of course, we cannot understand any one who is utterly unlike ourselves. They were not yet born into the spiritual world where He lived; He was strange to them, a maniac wandering from other spheres, and they went out to arrest Him. It is the trial of the children of the kingdom—and here we learn that it was often a trial of the King Himself—that their absorption in God and in His aims, their habit of setting their life, not by reference to the transitory landmarks of the world, but by sole reference to the Eternal Light and Will of God, gives them the appearance of being possessed. They are not of the world or of its thought. They are unworldly; the world therefore ostracises them. To the world unworldliness and

madness are synonymous. It is a reproach difficult to bear.

But the other event is this. The misunderstanding of the dull is trifling compared with the daring libel of the wicked. The religious leaders from Jerusalem, who speak with the authority of Moses and the Prophets, possessing, presumably, the insight to perceive, and the right to declare, the real nature of Him and of His work, after deliberate examination give, it would seem, a verdict for the guidance of the people. They solemnly pronounce that this ministry of His, which was healing and saving men on every side, was the work of the devil, and that He Himself was possessed by the personality—the diabolic personality—called Beelzebub. Now, it is a mistake and a misfortune for any man not to believe in God. It is also a misfortune, and leads to many mistakes, not to believe in and not to recognise that mysterious evil genius—subtle, because spiritual—working against the lives of men, which is called in the Scripture by a very general name—Satanas, or the Adversary. I say it is a mistake and it is a misfortune not to believe in God, and not to believe in the

evil force which is fighting against Him; but to confuse God and the devil, to take God for the devil, that is more than a misfortune; it is more than a mistake; it is in effect to take the devil for God. Atheism is a withering negation; the soul afflicted with it shrinks and dies, but Atheism is spiritual health by comparison with the disease of which I am speaking now, when you believe in God, and the God you believe in is the devil; so that God, the one God, the only God, is for you eternally denied and rejected. Now, the way in which Jesus deals with these men is amongst the most wonderful features of the Gospel. It sheds light upon many things, but it sheds a peculiar light upon Him, and upon the Spirit that was in Him. He sends for them—the same word is employed as in the thirteenth verse, where He summoned the disciples to Himself—He sends for these men, and He quietly argues with them. He shows them what any one not blinded by prejudice might have seen at once, that the charge they bring is inconsistent with itself. These possessed and suffering creatures were healed; as might be seen, they became sane;

what was called the devil was driven out of them. Evidently this could only have been done by someone entering into the house stronger than the possessor, binding the possessor, and rescuing from him the goods that he had claimed. The charge they made against Him was equivalent to saying of the thief, "He robs by the aid of the owner of the house," which is an obvious absurdity. He argues with them quietly, and shows them what it means. But there is something else to be said beyond this forceful logic of fact, and it shall be said to them, observe, not in wrath, but in truth, yes, even in tenderness; for, strictly speaking, there is nothing more tender than to take those who are in the path of ruin and to tell them where they are walking. May I venture to paraphrase what He said? It was in effect this: "I, at the Jordan yonder, received the Holy Ghost—not by measure—descending upon Me and penetrating my very heart. The Holy Spirit assured Me of My Sonship, My Messiahship, My message to the world. Since then that same Spirit has been speaking in My doctrine, and has been working in My work. That same Spirit has healed these diseased and



distraught souls, and driven out of them the other spirit that was ruining them. This is to Me a matter of direct and immediate consciousness. I know this as I know Myself. My Father and I are One. My Father is working in Me. I, here among men, am the mere agent, the Son of the Eternal Father. Now, when you abuse Me as a man, that is pardonable—all human judgments are liable to error—but when you affirm with all your authority as the interpreters of the Law, as the students of the inspired prophets, that this work and witness of the Holy Spirit of God emanates from Satan, you enter upon a fatal path, which, so far as this æon goes, presents no opportunity of return. Is God the devil and the devil God to you? Then every act of worship you bring will be devilry, and every deed you do, thinking it good, will be denial of God! In such a hopeless mesh," He goes on, "the chain will tighten upon you as you struggle; you will be held by it more firmly whichever way you move. In such a helpless confusion of thought and spirit the well of living water will have been turned into a cesspool for you, and as you confidently draw the water it will be poison that you drink."

This is the *first voice of Jesus from the bosom of His Church*. Let His Church strive with His lucidity and with His gentleness to make it plain to men; for if men do not know the evidences of Christ, if they are not in their minds convinced, and are waiting for conviction, it is always possible that they may see and believe. As truth shines upon them the blind eyes may be opened. But men who have examined Him and His work, have seen the evidences, have known, or might know, that He takes the sinful souls around us and transforms them, and puts the Light of God into the dark places of the human spirit; men who have seen it and know it and then solemnly and authoritatively declare that this is the work of the devil, there is no remission to them, there cannot be, God is the devil to them and the devil is God. And charity requires that we should make this plain to men, as our Lord Himself did.

The Cartoon of the Church presents us at once with an image of Love, of Terror, of Righteousness, of Judgment, of Truth that is stern, stern that it may save.

V.

THE CARTOON OF THE FIELD AND
THE LAKE.

(MARK IV.)

THE CARTOON OF THE FIELD AND THE LAKE.

THE scene is on the beautiful hill-girt Lake of Gennesaret. The foreshore is crowded with a throng of people greater than ever—so great that there is no standing-place for the Teacher, until He gets into a little fishing-boat and pushes from the shore, and then the people range themselves upon the shelving beach as in an amphitheatre. To Him, looking at them from the boat, with the narrow strip of sunlit sea between, the crowd of people, the white houses of Capernaum behind them, and to the right and left the lower slopes of the mountains, where it would seem the peasants were just casting abroad the grain on their sterile and rocky fields, to Him immediately this crowd appears to be the field, and He is the sower casting the seed of the Word. He begins to speak what is in His mind, as if He were simply

describing the action of the sower which they had often seen. There is no hint of any other meaning, and they are kept in spell-bound attention, as simple people usually are when they hear only what is quite familiar to them. And here is the explanation why He speaks in parables to the people. It is not, as might be thought from hastily reading the twelfth verse, to prevent the people from hearing and understanding lest they should be converted and forgiven. No! As He says, a lamp is lighted not to be put under a bushel. That is no ideal position for a lamp, though sometimes necessary. The principle He has at heart is to speak just as they were able to bear it. Thus v. 21 and v. 33 explain the obscure words of v. 12. To have spoken the mystery of the Kingdom of God to that indiscriminate crowd would have been quite useless. Men not spiritually awake are only bored by spiritual things. When these things are spoken they yawn, they fidget, they are impatient; what is said seems to them all up in the clouds; to explain the great realities to men in that state of mind is labour thrown away, just as it would be to discuss the higher mathematics

with persons who have not yet learned the first rules of arithmetic. If such people are to hear such things at all the truth must be "embodied in a tale"; it must reach them in the very commonest and simplest form, as if they were touching earthly things and handling them, not knowing that they were heavenly. It is necessary that the glories of the spiritual should be veiled for their own sake to dim eyes. Eyes in that condition see a ray where they would not see the blaze. Put the bushel on the light and the few straggling beams that appear in view will awaken the desire for the rest; put the blaze before them, and the poor weak eyes, startled, will take refuge in the dim corners of the caves with the bats and the owls. For it is a well-known fact that souls outside the Kingdom dread nothing so much as coming in; their great fear is "lest they should be converted and it should be forgiven them." They have to be wooed with parables; to those who are within, the parables can be explained.

Now let us watch how the Word, the seed, falls, not only on that crowd upon the shore of Galilee, but upon every collection of men to

whom the Word of the Kingdom comes. It runs in this way:—"Be converted and enter the Kingdom of God," or, "Come unto Me and I will give you rest." That is the seed that is sown broadcast. One out of four hears, and yet does not hear; before the Word even gets into the heart—the preoccupied heart—the enemy has carried it away. The plough will have to go through that heart before it will ever listen. A second out of the four hears it, and thinks it good. You see the sparkle in his eye, and the flush of resolution, "From to-day, I mean to follow Christ." But it is mere emotion; the sneer of the friend at home, the mere dislike of confessing the Saviour, before the message is fully delivered, will have mastered him, and he will be as eager to pull the seed up out of the soil as he seemed to be to let it enter. A third hears the word and just for Sunday receives it. If all the week were Sunday, he would receive it all the week; if he could give undivided attention to it, it would be an easy matter; but what with the worries of business, what with the interest of making and keeping and increasing worldly goods, what with the thousand and one desires that occupy

the heart and brain, he really cannot pay attention to this Word of the Kingdom. He likes to have it put in at the service on Sunday, and then he lets the thorns choke it the next day. One out of four, only one out of four, really hears and receives. And now what happens? The sower has dropped the seed; he does not know where it has fallen; he leaves it; he goes his way; he sleeps and rises night and day; little enough can he have to do with the growth. But there is a force at work in the heart which is just like the automatic force of the soil and the sun and the air, and the seed that has got into the heart begins to germinate and to grow. You look at it after a little while, and what a joy! A little blade has got above the surface. Some one wants to confess Jesus Christ. You watch it, and soon it is a tall stalk with an ear, and there is corn growing in the ear; it is a fruit. This one wants to live the life, wants to do the work of the Son of God. It seems to be a great result from what seemed a very little thing. Yes! it is like a grain of mustard-seed—a very little thing, it must be owned, but a Word, a spoken Word, penetrates the soil of the heart,

and insensibly takes root and begins to grow; the Christ who is seen as a Saviour begins to be the Master; the Master who is recognised as the Sovereign begins to be the Teacher; the Teacher, who is Sovereign and Saviour too, begins to give the power, and what was told with the lip is now done with the heart and the life; that which was sketched as a dream is now realised as a fact, and this little seed which fell into a friendly soil will grow until there will be a life Christ-filled—Christ in you, not only the hope of glory, but the power of salvation. Will you not receive the Word into a good heart? Will you not yourself allow the seed to penetrate? Jesus Christ, who, coming in, makes you a true and obedient child of God, cleanses you from sin, strengthens the inner nature, sheds abroad the love of God, gives you the power of an endless life, will you not let Him come in, as it were?

For notice the responsibility of hearing. According to your measure in hearing, He says, it will be measured unto you. Yes! and more will be added. Receive the simple message of Christ honestly, keep it diligently,

act on it fearlessly, and you will be able to receive more.

The larger the bin
The more He puts in.

Be all ears when Christ is speaking. Why should you be as a trodden ground, or as a rocky soil, or as the thorn-choked ground? Why should you not be the good ground and receive the seed that it may grow?

It is very curious how the world to-day illustrates what Jesus said on that occasion. Palestine, where He spoke the Word, was a down-trodden path, and the Word was snatched away from the beginning. Africa, eager and ardent, from Alexandria and Cyrene to Carthage and Hippo, received the Word with enthusiasm, and then affliction and persecution came, and it was destroyed. Europe took it—it was the salvation of Europe, and there is here no persecution nor affliction, no danger from without; but in Europe worldliness, riches, and ambitions, and the desires of this present life, choke it, and it brings forth little fruit. As yet there is no continent, no nation, no land, as a whole, that has proved to be good soil. Only the scattered children of God here

and there have received the seed into a good heart, and have brought forth fruit, thirty, sixty, or a hundred-fold.

That clear voice from the boat, ringing out over the crowd and up the mountain-side, has reached us too. It is coming to us whenever we read or hear the Gospel, and in the strange Hebrew phrase, which is wrongly translated in the modern version, He is saying, "He that hath ears, let him hear with all his might." Let him listen, for it is in the hearing he will receive. Open the ears! Let it come in! and then, as it comes in, He adds, "See what you are hearing. Do not let it come in unobserved. There is at once warning and encouragement. Let it come in, but know what it is, for it shall then bring forth fruit."

And thus all the day long, with shaft after shaft out of His abundant quiver, He spoke the Word unto them as they were able to bear it, first addressing the great crowd, then pausing for a while—while the crowd ate, possibly—and explaining it to His disciples, sitting at His side, and then resuming the speech to the crowd, and then speaking to His disciples again. His disciples,—who, as you gather from verse 10,

were more now than twelve—were becoming a little company of those who believed and listened and understood.

Evening came at length, and he longed for rest, “Shall we push over the quiet waters and get rest?” And directly the boat moved, He fell asleep—so wearied, that a sudden squall falling on the lake, dashing the waves over the low gunwale, filling the boat as it seemed, almost to sinking did not even awake Him. There is no work so exhausting as teaching, if anything is really taught and received. You may say that whatever is received has come literally out of the teacher, for the brain goes with the heart in teaching, and the nervous system is drawn pitilessly along by that impetuous team. The work of healing made demands on His physical strength, but the work of teaching taxed soul and body alike. The popular fancy pictures Jesus as a strong Titan that knew not fatigue; the simple history shows Him there in the stern of the fishing boat *dead beat*! Asleep, dreamless, unconscious, after the long day of teaching, for “He bore our infirmities,” and was as one of us.

But now there is a wonder. The disciples,

some in His boat, the rest in the other boats, fell into a panic because of the storm, and thought that they were going to the bottom. They were impatient because it seemed "to belong not to His care" whether He saw them die or live. And they wake Him up. You may see Him there, the calm pilot of that little fleet. Suddenly aroused from sleep, He is not at all alarmed. He sees the agitated waters crisping and curling, black in the night but for the white crests of foam. The fierce wind from the hill-top seems firmly pressing the boat under the waves. The wild rush and whistle of the elements are on His face and in His ears. But, living with God as He does, with God, who controls all the forces of Nature, He sees all these things in His Father's hands. Nature has never been to Him something distinct from God, but always God's instrument. He has seen it all along, and treated it, as Goethe would have said, as the mere veil or robe of His Father; and just as the field and the sower had aided Him in an illustration of the preaching of the Word, so the wild storm and terror are speaking from the same Father; though another lesson, the same to Him; that the child

is to trust in the Father, that the moment of alarm is the moment of faith, and that over those very waves the Father's will is absolute, and the child's trust is persuasive. It was the loud peal of God whistling in His ear in the storm, and the very waves and terror were simply another voice of the Father. There can be no fear with Him! no hesitation! With a simplicity which could never be forgotten by the awe-struck men who heard it, a simplicity which is preserved in the narrative in absolute truth, He quietly rose in the stern of the boat, and rebuked the wind, and He said to the sea, "Silence! Be muzzled!" And the squall passed, and the calm came, and He turned to those in the boat, and to those in the other boats, and He said to them, "O cowards, have you not yet faith?" Because faith is courage, and cowardice is always unbelief. If we believed, we should never tremble. If we had faith, we should never hesitate.

Now we ought to say honestly at the close of this study that this is the kind of event which is incredible to the Materialist. The Materialist lives in the illusion of the senses. He is unaware of the spiritual forces. This

world is to him not a spiritual centre at all. He himself is part of the phenomena he sees,

Rolled round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks and stones and trees.

The idea that the sea or the earth, that human life, body or soul, is controlled by forces which lie outside phenomena is intolerable to him. If he only thought, he would know it is true, but he does not think, he will not think. It is his philosophy not to think, but to go by the senses, and therefore this is all incredible to him. He is the only loser by his incredulity. The fact is not altered by it. If you and I have received this Gospel of Jesus, if we have felt the Spirit of the Highest, we are able to believe a simple and truthful narrative like this, because we know that God holds in His hand the wind and the sea, and controls, as He has made, all the laws that we call the laws of nature. If we are assured that the elements obeyed the voice of Jesus, it is because Jesus was one with God. For that reason we know that He could have controlled the forces of nature, and probably did. This is not to say that we believe in miracles. It is not to say that

we are to expect miracles for ourselves. We may rejoice that miracles are not. We may love better the Supreme Will of our Father than any personal interference on our behalf. But it is to say that we believe always in the possibility of miracles, and utterly decline the absurd and irrational dogma which asserts beforehand that God cannot work as He wills. It may be that you and I shall perish by storm and sea. If it falls to my lot to be in a storm when death comes, and I see the waves raging and death inevitable, I will say then as I say now, "If I die in the storm it is not because the storm is not under the control of my Father's hand; it is not that He could not if He would allay the waves and bid the sea be still, but it is because He has His chariots of water, as before His chariots of fire, in which the souls that trust Him can mount up into His presence, and His own can, even in such a chaos of the elements, be calm in the eternal and spiritual world." I do not ask you to believe that narrative, but I ask you to believe that it is absolutely possible, and if the evidence is conclusive you are bound to accept it. Believing that or not, do not fail

to believe that the Lord in whom we trust, the Christ who has saved us, controls and can control every element in the world that He has made, and our appeal of faith to Him is the appeal from the trusting child to the Omnipotent Father.

VI.

THE CARTOON OF DEMONS AND
DEATH.

(MARK V.)

THE CARTOON OF DEMONS AND DEATH.

I BEGIN by quoting a very curious passage from a letter written by St. Jerome, in the year 404 of our era, to a Roman lady named Eustochium, describing to her the journey of her mother Paula from Rome to Bethlehem. In that journey Paula passed through Samaria, or, according to its Greek name, Sebaste, and there, says St. Jerome, "she was filled with terror by the marvels she beheld, for she saw demons screaming under different tortures before the tombs of the saints, and men howling like wolves, baying like dogs, roaring like lions, hissing like serpents, and bellowing like bulls. They twisted their heads and bent them backwards until they touched the ground. Paula pitied them, shed tears for them, and prayed Christ to have mercy on

them." * Similar phenomena are described by other writers of the fourth and fifth centuries, such as Hilary, Sulpicius, and Paulinus.

Now, the scene which is presented to us on the east shore of the lake in this fifth chapter of St. Mark's Gospel is the one which a distinguished man of science has in our own day selected to illustrate the fabulous character of the Gospel narratives. His argument seems briefly to be this: Here is a story which is obviously incredible, and therefore the whole story of the life of Jesus is untrustworthy. Now, that argument, if we may be allowed to criticise it for a moment, is by no means conclusive. Supposing there is in the narrative of an historian something which is incredible, that does not discredit the historian, for it is a perfectly familiar fact in all ancient history that the most careful and the most honest of writers have been misinformed upon certain points, and in good faith have said what was not true. Historical narrative is never to be tested, like a chain, by the weakest link in it, but each point rests inde-

* Vid. Canon Fremantle's recent translation of St. Jerome. Page 201.

pendently upon its own evidence. If this story were, as we are told, incredible, and therefore we all agreed to leave it aside, and not to believe it, the person of Jesus Christ would still stand as distinct, as authentic as the person of any being that has ever lived upon the face of the earth. But that is scarcely enough to say. When a man of science brusquely declares that a story like this is incredible, you must not suppose that it is disproved. And, indeed, there are enough facts quite verified to-day, facts bearing on the mysterious region of existence which is hinted at in this narrative, to make even the most incredulous man of science cautious in dogmatising. I would suggest to you that while it is possible to briefly dismiss this narrative as incredible, it is quite as reasonable, and a great deal more fruitful in practice, to take the facts which are described here, the phenomena which came into emphasis when Jesus was present on the earth, as a possible explanation of a great deal which remains—and apart from such an explanation will remain—unexplained in human life. The records of crime, the dark ways of passion, and, perhaps, above all, the appalling facts which all of us

meet in our daily life connected with the use of intoxicating liquors, must suggest to every careful inquirer that there are active agents of evil which beset the human spirit in its earthly pilgrimage; press always at the weakest point of our moral nature seeking to effect an entrance; and if in a moment of weak compliance or slumbering inattention an entrance is effected, obtain an irresistible mastery and dominance over the spirit that is thus possessed. I say it is just as reasonable and more fruitful to take such a fact as this to interpret the uninterpreted facts of human life, the tragedies of human sin, which certainly are not explained by simply referring to what we call the weakness of human nature, yes, far more fruitful than with Professor Huxley to curtly dismiss the whole story as a fable.

But, to be candid, there is in this narrative one point which to my mind remains completely unexplained and unexplainable—I mean the account of the swine being possessed as the man was cured. Let me point out that this rests simply upon the authority of the narrative. As you study this narrative its photographic veracity makes you more and more unwilling to doubt a

single statement that it contains ; but when all is said and done you can only say that here is something stated by an historian whom we trust, something which happened or seemed to happen, and was recorded in perfect good faith. From that part of the narrative I should personally hesitate to draw any inferences whatever. But this is clear : the poor creature in the condition of the sufferers whom Paula saw at Sebaste was healed, restored to decency and to sanity ; and seeing, it would appear, in the headlong ruin of the swine an outward proof of the terrific force of evil which had possessed him, he wished to follow the Saviour, and the Saviour would not let him. In that profane Greek land beyond the lake, the country of the amorous poet Meleager, and the Epicurean Philodemus, the presence of a saved man might be the witness of salvation. He was to remain and publish it abroad, and in the gratitude of his heart he did as the Saviour commanded him.

But passing with Jesus back from Decapolis to Capernaum we are confronted with two marvels—the lesser of them locked into the bosom of the greater—the cure of long-stand-

ing disease, and the raising to life of one who had just fallen into the sleep of death. Now, it is not my intention to lessen the wonder of these occurrences. I should not like to minimise the tax which they make upon our faith. On the contrary, I would draw out in the clearest form that the demand they make is as great as any demand on faith could ever be. I should like to say that He whom we trust as a Saviour must be one out of whom virtue proceeds to cure every disease, and must be one who has power even over death. Without attempting to prejudge the question, which we must all settle for ourselves, concerning this particular narrative, I do venture to declare that He whose bearing and character, whose word and work we are examining in these pictures of St. Mark, He whom we have received as our Saviour from sin, as our Resurrection and Life, our Lord and our Sovereign, unquestionably could have done the things which are here attributed to Him. When the science of to-day wishes to close the whole discussion by the *à priori* assertion that these stories could not be believed, however strong the evidence were, and therefore it is of no use to examine

the evidence; after all science is simply declaring in its habitual way—dogmatically, I mean, and confidently—that Jesus could not have been what He said He was; could not have been what those who actually knew Him declared Him to be. Now, if Jesus was not what these men saw, then, indeed, your hope and mine is vain; there has broken no light upon this world from that dim, inscrutable Beyond. And if He was not what He said He was, let science recognise that it has the moral responsibility laid upon it of explaining the indisputable effects of Christianity upon a scientific basis, and not upon the flimsy suppositions of a Strauss and a Renan. It is useless to deny that Jesus was what He said He was until you can explain, according to your view of what He was, what He has done. And observe that He cannot be disproved, as eighteen centuries have shown, by the scornful sneers of Materialism, or the shallow judgments of the philosophy of the day.

But now, I want to urge upon you that if we are to judge of the events mentioned in the close of this chapter, we are bound first to try to see the scene as it might have been seen

through the eyes of Peter and James and John. Every great fact in the world is susceptible of satirical caricature, and men may caricature and satirise with great good faith as long as they are not, as it were, present at the fact. If they are present at the fact they do not satirise, unless they are dishonest. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance, if you want to form a judgment whether this woman was healed, whether that little girl was raised from the dead, that you should look at it with candid eyes, and look long and closely before you give your verdict. And it is precisely this close investigation of the eye that we are enabled to obtain from the narrative of St. Mark. This is what we see:—

As Jesus lands again on the shore of Capernaum, there is a man Jāirus, one of the religious officials of the town, that comes in the crowd to meet Him. And he shows at once a remarkable faith in Him, a trust which seems to border upon worship, for he falls on the beach at His feet. Prejudiced as we may suppose him to be, as all the rulers of the synagogues were, against Jesus, and unbelieving as we may suppose him to be, grief brought him

to the feet of the Saviour. His little girl was at the last extremity, and no doctor could save her. He was there to ask this noted wonder-worker whether He would come and touch her and heal her. Immediately Jesus moves towards the house, and the crowd, eager to see the issue of this request, throngs Him, so that, though it is presumably only a few steps from the shore to the house, it becomes difficult for Him to move along. And in the crowd there is a woman who seems not to know the matter in hand, though, poor soul, her suffering might have excused her importunity, even if she had known, for just as long as the dying child had lived, viz., for twelve years, she had been labouring under a distressing and apparently incurable disease. Of all the characters in the Gospel this nameless woman is the most touching. So shrinking, so modest, that she must not claim the Master's attention; and, indeed, she was perhaps ashamed to speak aloud what was in her heart, she yet says to herself, "If I could just touch His garments I dare say He would heal me." That was what clever people would call superstition, but the Father in heaven

takes account of the faith that underlies even the superstition in the hearts of His children. And one would scarcely have been able to call Jesus a Saviour if He had been insensible to the shy and timorous approach of this obscure sufferer, if there had been no power to go out from the Divine heart to save her, if He had turned away unobservant and she had not been healed. As it was He turned and said, "Daughter, thy faith has saved thee; go to live in peace, and be well of this disease which has been thy scourge."

But this brief delay has been too long, and a messenger comes from the sick house, and whispers to the anxious father, "She is dead; it is of no use for the Teacher to come now." Jesus overhears the whispered word, and, with an exquisite tenderness, He turns to the man whose lips are a-quiver, whose face is pale, and whose eyes are filling with irrepressible tears, "Do not fear; only believe." And then, briefly forbidding the crowd to go with Him any further, He approaches the house with His three chosen friends and witnesses alone. You can look into that house. That is the commonest scene in the world, though we

keep a veil over it. When the anxious watch and the arduous ministry of the sick-bed are over, and the heavy air is burdened by the sobs and agonised ejaculations of the sufferers; when some woman from the household or the neighbourhood—there is always some such ministrant at hand—tearless and sad with many such experiences, is closing the eyes and adjusting the limbs of the dead,—that is of all other situations in life the one where the Saviour is most needed. Of any religion we may ask as a test, what it has to say to us, not so much when we are dying—for then we do not need anything said, it is too late, as it were—but when we are losing those whom we love? A young literary man recently published to the world his religious views,* and he declares, amongst other things, that the hereafter is a matter of no concern to us. Apparently he has not yet loved and lost, he has not closed the eyes of a mother or of a little daughter. If he had he would know that what he dismisses so lightly in literature, is of all things in the world the most pressing, the most important.

* The Religion of a Literary Man, Richard Le Gallienne. (Elkin Mathews and John Lane.)

It is in a sense the real pith and point of life and of religion, whether love is barred by death, whether this dark shadow which freezes the blood at the heart, and apparently plucks irrevocably our beloved from our hands, is a reality or only an appearance. It is *the* question of life whether the dead can live, or whether at the grave we leave them for ever.

And Jesus comes to the house of mourning, and His words are memorable from the beginning. "Why this tumult and weeping?" He says; "the child did not die, but she is sleeping." Now grief is always incredulous of joy, and the great truths of the Spirit ring hollow in the chilly chambers of death. Some, therefore, perhaps those who felt it most, literally laughed at Him, knowing that she was dead. But He, with that strange authority which appears in all He does, clears the room of those who laugh and those who weep, and steps up to the curtained corner where the dead body lies—father and mother on either hand of Him, and behind, the three who trusted Him and in whom He trusted.

As He steps forward it is well for us to watch closely what He does, and to reflect

what it means. These three men, you remember, are the men, the ignorant peasants, who founded the Christian Church—that Christian Church that has transformed, and that is transforming, the world—these three men, Peter and James and John, are responsible for the faith we hold. On their authority this narrative is preserved for us in history. You have to ask, Is it possible that they were deceived, as science tells us they were? Is it possible that they were deceivers, as the ribaldry of secularism declares that they were? And you, with science and truth and religion and humanity in your heart have got to determine, Are James and Peter and John deceived or deceivers?

For this is what they saw, or this is what they thought they saw, and told to us. They saw Him go to the dead child and take her by the hand; they heard Him speak in the familiar language of the street—the language that the common people at that time used. He said, quite gently we may suppose, “Little girl, get up!” And the child got up and stood on her feet and walked. The parents were transported, as it says, with a great ecstasy, but He

was perfectly quiet, and only gave directions that they should not talk about this matter to anyone. It was not His purpose to reverse the kindly law of death, or to say that little children and elder people should not die. He who would sanctify death, touched death reverently. He would not let the world say, "He has come to close the gates of the tomb." He wished the world to know He had come to open them, that the world might pass through. Let no one then speak of this, except these chosen witnesses, who having seen it would in time be bound to narrate it, and having narrated it, would meet the future with their clear and calm assertion that veritably on that day their Lord and Master raised from the dead a little child. As for Him, like any ordinary doctor, He told them to give the weak, emaciated child a little food to eat, and passed out.

It was a work altogether of love and of power; a work not to make you marvel, but to reassure you. It was not to be talked about, but to be held in the heart, that He can vanquish death, and that He understands the sorrows of the bereaved.

Now the evidence for that work of love and

power is precisely as strong as God wished it to be. That is to say, it is sufficiently strong that every one who wills may, without any intellectual dishonesty, believe it for his infinite comfort; and every one who will not, may remain, and shall remain, unconstrained and unconvinced. That was the nature of the evidence that God intended. Those who hug death and shut their eyes against the miracle of life, the unchecked power of the Lord of Life, shall abide in the shadow of death. When their little ones die they shall be hopeless as they deserve to be, since, when the light comes, they will not open their eyes. But you, who have learned to observe, and know who He is that came, and what He is that loves, you will understand the vast significance of this little fact in history, that the Son of Man is Lord of life and of death, and in His hands are the very keys of Hades; and you will joyfully embrace the truth that no one can take from you. When your dead are carried out you will sorrow not as those who have no hope; and when death comes to you, you will not loathe him as a foe, but welcome him as the dear friend of Christ, who walked with Christ,

and Christ with him. In the language of our great Christian poet, you will understand that the love of God touching the dead has given you cause never to harbour a misgiving upon the subject of the grave :—

No, at noonday in the bustle of man's worktime

Greet the unseen with a cheer!

Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,

"Strive and thrive!" cry "Speed—fight on, fare ever
There as here!"

Let it not be in vain that we, with reverence
and eager inquiry, have meditated upon Jesus
in the presence of Demons and Death!

VII.

THE CARTOON OF REJECTION AND
RECEPTION.

(MARK VI.)

THE CARTOON OF REJECTION AND RECEPTION.

THE canvas of this sixth chapter of St. Mark is unusually crowded; and yet it forms a single picture, for it is all concerned with this one subject: Who received Jesus, and in what way, and how opposition turned into rejection, and rejection led to tragic consequences. This last point is suggested by the scene which is painted as it were in the background of the picture, representing the brutal murder of John the Baptist, the Forerunner—a hint given, no doubt, as to the end which often awaits those who are faithful; for this man, according to Herod's own showing, was a righteous man and a holy. It is with the unconscious instinct of the artist that the Evangelist introduces this incident just at the point where the disciples are charged with the task of proclaiming the Kingdom of God, and sent to

carry out their Master's work. They are to remember that the end of John the Baptist may probably be their end too.

The picture, then, is grouped in this way: *First*, in vv. 1—6, He goes into His own country, and His own receive him not. *Second*, vv. 7—29, there are some of His own who do receive Him, and He appoints them to do His work—their eye fixed, as already suggested, upon the possible end of fidelity in the fate of John the Baptist. *Third*, vv. 30—52, the Master besieges the understanding of His disciples with demonstrations of His power, and of His readiness to help. And the *fourth* panel of the picture, vv. 53—56, shows how the world, which will not have Him as Teacher and Saviour, crowds about Him for the physical blessings of health.

But that which strikes us in the whole picture is His bearing, the qualities of His own character which are incidentally revealed, the general effect of His person, and His activity. The portrait is drawn only with a few significant lines, and we have to pay very careful attention to them if we would in any sense see Him who is portrayed.

There is one other preliminary remark that must be made. The spiritual meaning of these miracles in the chapter is so obvious and so impressive that we are tempted at first to think that surely they must be allegories; surely we are not to press them as literal facts. But then, on second thoughts, as we notice the curious dulness of the men with whom the Master was in contact, how, according to their confession—for it is no doubt Peter's report which appears in this narrative—"They understood not concerning the loaves, but their heart was hardened," it dawns upon us that possibly it would have been beyond the power even of Jesus to wake these torpid natures to the understanding of spiritual truth except by the exercise of such powers, exciting wonder, admiration, and gratitude, as are here recorded.

I. In the *first panel*, then, we have to observe Jesus among His own countrymen at Nazareth. The situation there was so strange that He Himself, we are told, was filled with astonishment. We shall do well to investigate it. The people at Nazareth were perfectly amazed with the powers manifested in Him. They were amazed with the wisdom of His teaching, and

they were amazed with the mighty works which accompanied it. There was wisdom to convince the intelligent and the more religiously inclined; there was power to arrest the attention of the less religious and the more stupid. It was a combination which one might suppose would carry conviction all along the line, and overbear all opposition; just as in our own day the very general recognition that the teaching of Jesus is the highest and the noblest standard of human conduct ever manifested to the world might, you would suppose, bring men to His feet, especially when it is accompanied, as it is, by proofs of His power in transforming individuals and societies and nations. It ought not to be difficult for any considering person to recognise who He is. It is a question which history itself seems to be always asking, "Whence hath this man these things?" How is it that the civilised world to-day is searching with a more curious interest than ever the fragmentary utterances of His lips which have been recorded; and how is it that He is always accomplishing transformations of life and character amongst men which the utmost reach of our knowledge and intelligence is unable to

accomplish apart from Him? Now, what filled even Him with astonishment at Nazareth was that instead of faith the only result of these very obvious facts was incredulity. It is evident that into these human breasts entered trifling passions and prejudices. They whispered among themselves, "He is only the village carpenter, and His mother and His brothers and sisters we all know very well." Or, as we put it to-day—I mean by "we" those who, to-day, correspond to these people of Nazareth—"He is only a man like ourselves; it is absurd to speak as if He were Divine." And they of Nazareth were offended in Him, as the Nazarenes of to-day are still offended in Him. And yet what a strange tendency that is! How could He prevent an offence which comes from so deep-rooted a perversity? If He were not a man like ourselves He could bring us nothing, He could reveal to us nothing. On the other hand, if He were only a man like ourselves He would have nothing to reveal and nothing to bring. It must be an exceptional event, a supernatural fact which is to restore the ruined world to God. But what is to happen if that perverted

world will always reject the exceptional fact, the supernatural event, on the ground that it is exceptional? It was a cause of scandal to them, and they rejected Him. "He came unto His own and His own received Him not," just as He comes to-day to numbers of the people who have been brought up within the borders of the Church, people who you might suppose would be eager to receive Him, and it is they that reject Him.

II. But passing to this *second panel*, there are some of His own, the original twelve, that receive Him. And from this point, you will notice, in the Gospel the Lord sets Himself deliberately and constantly to train these twelve, to prepare them to apprehend the things which the men of Nazareth regarded as a scandal. The crowd could not yet be taught; possibly the twelve can be taught, and as a method of preparation and teaching He sends them out. The Greek work for to send is *ἀποστέλλειν*; they are therefore called in this connection "The Apostles," or "The Sent." He sees that they will best apprehend Him by trying to do His work, and by seeking to exercise His powers. They will best see what

rejection means by being themselves rejected, and having to shake off the dust of their shoes against the city that will not receive them. They will best appreciate the nature of His calling if they are, for a few days at least, separated from Him, and sent, entirely unprovided, without food, without money, to conquer disease, not by medical skill, but with symbolic oil, and to oust demons with the word of His authority. Now that remains to this day the very best way of understanding Jesus. Stripped of all material aids, like Pastor Von Bodelschwingh, of Bethel, grappling barehanded with disease disappointment and death, cast into prison, if you will, for faithfulness, made a martyr, a sacrifice, a derision, a man frequently comes to apprehend who his Master is, and to rely absolutely upon His power and His willingness to help. It is thus with the deepest purpose that at this point He sends His untried disciples, to go out and preach His word and to heal diseases in His name.

III. But we pass to the *third panel* of the picture, where they have returned from their first experience, and the Master has something further to teach them. He teaches them by

two wonderful signs, as the Evangelist calls them. These two signs—the feeding of the five thousand and the walking upon the sea—are, we observe, full of spiritual truth; you can hardly help reading their spiritual lessons. But the first purpose of them was not to convey spiritual truth, but to convince these twelve men, the chosen few, that the Master whom they served, the Carpenter of Nazareth, whose mother and brothers and sisters were common Nazarenes—that this Master was in such a relation with the Unseen and Eternal Father that He could deal plastically with the very forces of Nature, and could subject to His spiritual rule the material things which defy the manipulation of man. Now, let us freely confess that there is an extraordinary tendency to-day, under the hectoring and the ridicule of what is called Science, to explain away these facts. Nothing should induce you to explain them away. On the contrary, to an unbelieving age emphasize their wonder, for the salvation of the age lies in the wonder of His power. But let us be distinct. These are not the proofs of Jesus, these are not the proofs that He was Divine. It is not on the ground of miracles

that we know who He was. *Who* He was we know from *what* He was, from those moral and spiritual truths which are presented upon the canvas of St. Mark. But when we know who He was and is, then it is of the greatest importance that we should understand and believe that He is Sovereign over the material world. It is essential for us to know that all power is given unto Him in Heaven and in earth; so that while we, as thoughtful students of Nature, and believers in truth for truth's sake, are eager to recognise what is called Natural Law, we should be equally ready to recognise that the boundary of Natural Law is being constantly widened by growing knowledge and that our Lord is not the product but the maker of Natural Law. And it is in the spirit of that revelation of His power that I want you to look at these two signs that were given to His disciples, as narrated in this chapter.

He needed rest, and so did His disciples. The pressure of your fellow-creatures all around you day and night has at last a deadening, stifling effect. You want somewhere to be alone with Nature, and so alone

with God; where none are coming and going; where there is time at least so much as to eat bread—the bread of heaven. And He says to them, “Let us push out into the Lake and find a solitary place upon the shore, where we can be quiet for a while.” And it is just here that one of the most beautiful traits of Jesus is made manifest. Frustrated of rest, confronted on that lonely spot by a crowd as great as that on the shore of Capernaum, He does not allow Himself any irritation or the slightest trace of impatience. His great heart is immediately moved with compassion. He is to His own fancy a Shepherd who has found a number of His hungering sheep in the wilderness, and He is all at their disposal, to feed and to tend, to teach and to help them. I venture to think when you come to reflect what this means you will see that from the human side He could not have given to His disciples a more perfect example of what is meant by self-sacrifice. But there is something more. The men are too dull to understand this at present. When the day wanes therefore, in the fading light, He must feed these rude disturbers of His rest, these wearisome intruders upon His retire-

ment. He must feed them, and in such a way that His disciples might, if they could, understand. The groups of hundreds and fifties had no idea where the food came from, but the disciples, you would suppose, might have known if they had had eyes to see. The strange thing was that they did not apprehend. Dazed and bewildered in the presence of so strange a Master, they mechanically handed the bread and the fish to group after group, not understanding. As they saw afterwards, their heart was, as it were, hardened.

And apparently because of this strange hardening of their intelligence the further sign must be given. He tells them to get into the boat and to row back to the town, while He sends the satisfied people away by land. And then He Himself in the solitude climbs up the cliff to pray. It is already, we presume, well on into the first watch of the night, but He has a great request to make, and He needs much prayer. Through the second watch of the night on the cliff He prays. Now it is midnight, and through the third watch of the night, the dreary and deadly hours between twelve and three, He still prays. And as the

last watch of the night comes—in the grey dawn—from His tower of prayer He looks down upon the lake and sees that the steady head-wind all through the night has prevented the disciples from making any progress. They are toiling at the oar, just where they were on the previous evening. And now, has the power come to Him, has He entered into the place of the Most High? Has He grasped the supernatural, so as to touch this base material heart of the disciples? He comes down from the cliff and He walks upon the troubled seas. The disciples see Him, and supposing, naturally enough, that it is but a phantom, cry out in dismay. He answers them, “Be of good cheer; it is I,” and steps into their boat. Words which come to us now, and always must, as the lofty assurance on which alone the Christian life can be based; for there is no possibility of any sustained Christian life in a world so difficult as this unless, however contrary the wind, and however rough the waves, our Master can step into the boat and say, “Be of good cheer; it is I.” The lesson was taught them, and they were never likely to forget it.

IV. And then, finally, there is the *fourth panel* of the picture. He comes to the land in the ship, and they have no opportunity of touching the shore; they have to moor upon the beach, because immediately there are crowds of people about Him again; and when at last He gets through them, and enters into the neighbouring villages and towns, it is the same story—crowds everywhere; the market-place is always full of the sick in their beds. Consider what this means. Burdened as He is with the greatest truths of life, bringing the revelation of God, of heaven, of Eternity, He is for ever detained in these endless tasks of physical healing; ministering to bodies which at the best will be in the grave in the course of a few short years; never turning aside from any sick or sorrowing soul; never saying what we are all at times tempted to say, “No! that is not My work; mine is a spiritual mission; it is a theologic mission; I cannot be troubled with these imperious and distracting needs of suffering around Me.” It is the constant feature in the shifting scene. Always the crowd of sufferers seeking a cure with the gross and tiresome selfishness of disease.

People indifferent to God, people who sleep if He speaks to them of heaven, people who have no soul and no insight, dead logs of the earth as they appear, but clamorous for health, dragging upon Him physically until He is worn down, tired and disappointed with the importunate demand, "Do not talk to us of God! Do not talk to us of the soul! Heal our bodies and be done with it."

The selfish, diseased world dragging at the body of the Lord, and He perfectly patient, apparently willing to spend whole days in healing, without speaking, if it is necessary; so tender to the suffering world that even in His own unbelieving Nazareth "He laid His hands on a few sick folk and healed them"! I do not know if you perceive the point of this picture. It is to me one of the most impressive in all the Gospels. Eager for spiritual results as He must have been, longing to establish the kingdom of God in the hearts of men, to touch the conscience, to wake the soul to the new life of God, and yet for ever occupied with these materialistic details of disease. Oh! that is the wonder of Jesus, the patience of Jesus! The exigent demands

of a misunderstanding world do not irritate Him. He bears all, He heals all, that He may save all; and He can wait and ever wait until the time is ripe. Rejected by you, He waits for you. Spurned as a Saviour, He draws near to graciously minister to your body, restores you to health, raises you from the sick bed, extricates you from your embarrassments, seeing whether the touch of a brother's hand can ever wake the soul within you, seeing whether you are really dead and cannot be awoken even by that. There is Jesus—the portrait of the Saviour of the world.

VIII.

THE CARTOON OF CHRIST AND THE
PHARISEES.

(MARK VII. 1—23, AND X. 1—12.)

THE CARTOON OF CHRIST AND THE PHARISEES.

IF you will put together the first twenty-three verses of the seventh chapter and the first twelve verses of the tenth chapter, you will have a single and complete picture, because in these passages the religious ideas and the moral principles of our Lord are brought out by contrast with those of the Pharisees, *i.e.*, by contrast with those of the most religious representatives of the most religious nation of antiquity. We have so associated the idea of hypocrisy with the Pharisees that we almost use the words "Pharisee" and "hypocrite" as convertible terms. But if we would see the bearing of our Lord's teaching when He was upon earth, it would be well for us, in place of the familiar phrase, "Pharisees and Scribes," always to read "the most pious of the Jews and the

most conscientious Biblical scholars of their day."

Judaism was the religion of a sacred book; the Scribes were diligent students, who preserved and interpreted the sacred writings. The Pharisees were the best examples that could be produced of such a religion; men who, as the Lord said, searched the Scriptures, believing that in them they had eternal life. It is true, the tradition of the elders had somewhat overlaid the original Scriptures, but not, I think, more than the traditions of Christianity have overlaid the teachings of the New Testament. It is true that some of the teachings of the elders practically reverse the teachings of the Law, but that was not done deliberately, or with any conscious insincerity. For example, the section of the Mishna which is called *Tohoroth* contains endless details about the purification of vessels which is mentioned in this chapter of St. Mark. But these endless details, tedious as they are to us, are the careful delimitations of a conscientious spirit. It is true that the decision referred to here, that a son instead of giving his money to his parents who needed it might bestow it upon a religious object, and

so avoid the filial duty, might result in selfish neglect; but it is not to be supposed that that was the intention of the regulation. It is difficult for us to-day to realise the noble side of that ancient Judaism, but noble it must have been when a rabbi of the period could speak, and believe, a noble sentiment like this: "Be bold as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a stag, and strong as a lion, to do the will of our Father in Heaven." What we have to do is to rid our minds of the idea that the Pharisees were, as a body, conscious hypocrites. Their regulations about purification were just of the same kind as the endless details of modern ritualism, which occupy time and thought and money that would be better bestowed upon strictly religious objects. And the evil of their regulations was that these things, which are so easily done, hide from the eye of the doer the inward things which are so difficult to do. The Pharisees were quite as sincere as the ordinary churchgoer of to-day who gives his money generously to a religious object, but is not so scrupulous about the way in which the money was made—the man who would be horrified to desecrate the Sabbath, but

in business will violate many of the principal regulations of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. I ask you to dwell upon this, because we miss the application to ourselves if we dismiss the Pharisees as hypocrites. They were hypocrites, but not in the sense that they were consciously insincere; only in the sense that their religion was a conscientious externalism. Their religion was a dutiful discharge of religious offices, which, after all, are trivial, excluding the inward things which in God's sight are all-important. In a word, their hypocrisy consisted in their religion being a *Law* instead of a spiritual and moral principle. It was legalism which had ruined them; it was the spiritual religion which they needed. We must not, then, suppose that our Lord's quarrel was with the traditions of the elders as distinct from the original Law; He was not merely brushing aside the accretions in order to re-assert the old Mosaic institutions and to re-establish the Old Testament religion. His criticism applied equally to the whole Law; that is plain from the passage that is before us, where He says, according to the Evangelist, in a most earnest

and emphatic way, "There is nothing from without a man that, going into him, can defile him." In saying that, He drew the pen, as it were, right through the eleventh chapter of Leviticus, which gives detailed regulations about the very numerous things which might not be eaten lest they should defile, mentions objects which might not even be touched, and exhorts the children of the Covenant to abstain from these prohibited articles of diet on the high ground that they are to be holy, as God is holy.

I confess that sometimes in considering this daring repeal of that passage in Leviticus I am tempted to believe that our Lord held the views of the Pentateuch which modern scholarship has made familiar to us all. You may be aware that these chapters in Leviticus, from xi. to xxv., constitute a little book by themselves. They are called by scholars "The Law of Holiness," and they are referred to the period after the Exile. One might almost suppose that the Lord drew a distinction between these chapters and the ancient Law of Moses, and that in setting aside the whole regulation of chapter xi., "making all meats clean," He felt

Himself to be rejecting the traditions of men rather than the Law itself. If that is not the explanation—and I am bound to admit that it sounds exceedingly rash—then we must suppose that He deliberately repealed the Law of Moses as such ; and that His quarrel with the Pharisees of the day was not that they were bad Jews, but that they were such good Jews, and were trying so conscientiously to carry out the endless details of a ceremonial Law.

When He enters into the house to explain to His disciples what He has said, we begin to realise how He stands in opposition to a ceremonial Law. In His own majestic way He ascends a mountain higher than Sinai, and issues a promulgation about things clean and unclean, which in effect we must confess three-fourths of Christendom to-day do not in the least understand. Religious defilement, He says, is entirely a matter of the heart, and of the spirit, and of the mind—the thoughts that are evil, the desires that are impure and dishonest and vengeful, the love of money, shiftiness of character, culpable stupidity—these are the things that defile a man, He says. Coming from within, they make the life unclean. We

need diligently to study this saying, and to be sure that we understand every word that He used. Without attempting to go through it in detail, mark that word which is translated "stupidity." The Greek is *ἀφροσύνη*, which means the illogical, the obstinate, the prejudiced state of mind, the mother of all bigotry and fanaticism. It is when we are incapable of rightly judging others, unwilling to understand those who differ from us; it is when we seize upon unreasoning dogmas, and enforce them on others with all the cruel tyranny of unreason; it is when we are misled, and misjudge, from sheer stupidity of mind, that there is, as the Lord says, defilement all through the life; the very fountains of charity are poisoned, and all the life of man is defiled. When He included stupidity amongst the defilements of the heart, He was, beforehand, condemning the Pharisees of Protestantism, just as in the previous verses He condemned beforehand the Pharisaism of Roman Catholics. It is not given to us all to have great abilities or wide learning, but it is possible for every humble mind to be open, to be candid, to be fair, to be scrupulously just in understanding the position of others; and when,

through stupidity, we reverse all this, our life, says the Lord, is defiled from within.

But this leads us to His conflict in the tenth chapter with the Judaism of His day upon an ethical question which lies at the root of all genuine progress—the question of marriage. If our Lord brushed aside the ceremonialism of ancient tradition, He was very delicate in His treatment of every truly moral element in the ancient law. He delighted to take, as He has taken here some expression from the Books, and to bring it out with unexpected force as a confutation of what was popularly held to be the teaching of the Scriptures.

Now the Law of Moses on the question of divorce was an improvement, no doubt, upon pre-existing institutions, but in Deuteronomy xxiv. it certainly taught that if a man found anything in the wife he had married that was not pleasing in his eyes, he might dismiss her with a bill of divorcement. The reform of Moses consisted, probably, in requiring a bill of divorcement—before, the man's bare word was sufficient. But how dangerous a principle that was, is only understood when you re-

member how the Rabbis applied it. The school of Hillel explained that this "displeasing in his eyes" covered the case of his wife spoiling his food—for which he might divorce her; and Rabbi Akbar went so far as to say that if a man had found another woman fairer than his own wife he might divorce her. Once allow the principle that man or wife is to be judge whether the arrangement is quite satisfactory, and the casuistry of legalism will make it possible to secure divorce on any terms you please. In His divine power our Lord and Master takes hold of the word in the second chapter of Genesis, and flings it against the whole Mosaic law, declaring that the regulation of Moses was a mere compromise because of the hardness of the hearts of the people. The importance of this I want to emphasize, for this question is one which is being freely and even licentiously discussed in modern society. In all parts of Christendom divorce is becoming commoner. In England, it is true, there are not more than 300 or 400 cases in the year, but in our great sister country, the United States, there are as many as 25,000 cases in a year; and while the practice of Christendom is becoming careless,

there are teachers among us, like Ibsen, who are discussing the question whether it is the duty of a wife to remain with her husband, if, after closer acquaintance, she becomes dissatisfied with his appreciation of her, or finds that certain things in his past life have been contrary to her innocent expectation. These discussions fill the air; many of them are quite crude; some of them are very definite and mischievous, and the ferment of opinion is liable to disturb the slow but sure evolution of society and family life. And therefore I ask you to let the absolute ethics of Jesus Christ rise up as the standard by which all such questions are to be tried.

Himself abstaining from marriage, for reasons which do not need to be explained, He declared that it was from no depreciation of that sacred relation of life; that He had no sympathy with the ascetic principle which appeared immediately in the Gnostic sects, and obtained a firm foothold in the Catholic Church. With one word He placed the whole question upon its highest and holiest ground. He taught us that a man and his wife are a new single creation of God; God joins them

together. If they come together without God's will, following their chance desires or their unhallowed impulses; seeking social status, wealth, or dignity by that sacred step; if, in a word, they are married atheistically, not bringing God into the relation, then that is not marriage at all—it is only sin, and cannot be hidden as sin by any institution that the law chooses to create. But when they are married—married in the true way, joined together by God—then the tie that is formed is indissoluble; it is indeed for better or for worse they take each other. It is possible that the life they live together may be unclouded sunshine, but that is not likely. It is much more probable that it will be the alternation of cloud and sun; it is much more probable that it will demand self-restraint, self-sacrifice, delicate consideration on each side, and the humble desire to please rather than to be pleased; and it is precisely that discipline which constitutes the Divine significance of the relation; and that discipline will be for ever impossible unless the tie is perceived from the beginning to be final, settled, and sacred—to dominate life, and not to be dominated by it.

Now taking into account the whole of this interview of our Lord with the Pharisees, observe how the note of His Divinity sounds out in His easy and natural supremacy over the ancient Law. No man—no human being merely, still less a Jew—could have touched the hoary traditions of the Elders with such a hand, with such ready sympathy for all that was Divine in it, but such uncompromised freedom to improve, to change, to repeal. But if you observe the Divine note in His way of touching the ancient law, surely there is not one of us so spiritually dead as not to perceive more distinctly still the very voice of God in His treatment of the marriage question. There is no action of life which so needs to be brought up into the presence of Eternity, and judged from the standpoint of God, as this common action that we call marriage.

I want to put before you a supposition this morning. Suppose that England were a Christian country—oh, happy and daring imagination!—and suppose that this one law of the kingdom were dutifully obeyed, so that our family and our social life were universally

based upon understanding and discernment; suppose, in consequence of this, all marriages were truly made in heaven, no one daring to marry until God gave the word and kindled the holy mutual love which is the necessary condition of a true marriage, every one preparing for ever to remain unmarried rather than leave Him out of the question; suppose that, in consequence of this, the married people were to be made one flesh in God's sight, a new creation of His Spirit! Put the case. Thanks be to God there are many such marriages in England, and we may say with confidence that they are the secret of our country's greatness. Because these pious marriages are not altogether rare, and homes are founded on them, and children trained within the sacred circle of the home, England shines among the nations, and healing influences go out from her even into the most corrupt societies of the world. Suppose it were not only occasional but common; suppose it were not only common but general; if our young men looked at marriage with Christ's eyes, and if our young women entered into it through the Spirit of Christ, under-

standing what He means by being present at a marriage feast, so that there should be no unhallowed espousals, none of the fatal violation of the sanctities in the name of marriage; one-half of the grinding misery of English life would be immediately at an end; for we little dream how much of the misery of life is due to unhallowed, godless marriages. But not only so; this one law of Christ, understood and obeyed, would solve our large sad social problems. We should have no redundant population, for the children of such marriages, however numerous, could never be redundant. The children trained in such homes would be trained in natural piety; the vice, which is, more than anything else in us, the product of heredity, and transmitted from unhallowed unions, would disappear from purified homes; and though criminals and incapables would not vanish all at once, the strong nexus of the purified society could deal with them, reclaim them, or, at least, care for them tenderly until death removed them from our midst. The laws of Christ are so complete, so eternal, so Divine, that each one of them seems to contain within itself the potency of all good, and we see that

if only one of His laws could be generally obeyed the Kingdom of God would come and society would be regenerated. "Oh! that we had such a heart to hear Him, and to keep His commandments, that it might be well with us and with our children for ever." May He teach us to sit at His feet and understand the words that fall from His lips, bringing our lives and our homes into harmony with the Divine Law, which is the very antithesis of Legalism, whether the Legalism is Jewish or Christian.

IX.

THE GENTILE, THE DUMB, AND THE
BLIND.

(MARK VII. 24—VIII. 26.)

THE GENTILE, THE DUMB, AND THE BLIND.

IF you take from Mark vii. 24 to viii. 26 as a single passage, there rises before you a picture in the life of Jesus with a background of unusual interest; we can only mark the simple outlines as they are presented here. In the first part of it—from the 24th verse to the end of the 7th chapter—we find the Lord seeking retirement. As He could not gain it in the desert, where the intruding multitudes always found Him, He sought it in the great populous heathen towns that lay to the north of the Jewish territory. Among alien and pagan people He sought a few days of peace. That country might be described as an arc of the circle that sweeps round from Tyre and Sidon on the west, through Damascus to Gadara on the south-east of the Sea of Tiberias. At that time the great cities of Phœnician civilisation

were already decaying, but the great cities—ten in number—of the Græco-Roman civilisation were in their prime, cities which had been restored and beautified and filled with a teeming life by the Roman occupation under Pompeius the Great about a hundred years before. In these busy and cultivated cities Jewish influence was but slightly felt; the language spoken was Greek. The traveller in the Holy Land to-day is confronted in that district with the grandest natural scenery and the most interesting fragments of a noble architecture to be found in any part of the East. Into this country Jesus goes, but not, you observe, for a missionary purpose. He goes to find rest. It is doubtful whether He even knew their language. It is evident from verse thirty-four, where He uses His native tongue, that He did not attempt to speak Greek. With the wise economy of the true worker He sought rest, and He would not attempt a work which He could not do.

His mission, you must remember, was to Israel. Some people have taken offence at the words that He used to this Greek woman about the dogs under the children's table; but to

take such offence is to misunderstand Jesus, both as a man and as the Messiah. He had all eternity to work in. From all eternity He had been working; He neither began nor ended with those three busy years. But those three years were dedicated to Israel. He meant to feed the Children of the House, to win them if it were possible, and, as it proved to be impossible, to choose out of them such as would respond for the work of the future. Of course, He had come to seek the world, but He would seek the world through them, training and preparing them for a world's task. So far from taking offence at these words to the Syro-Phœnician woman, I would learn from them a most important lesson. As a great French writer says, "The first rule of the man dedicated to great things is to refuse to mediocre men the power of turning him aside from his course." It is not strength but weakness to be at everyone's beck and call; the certain way of accomplishing nothing in this world is to attempt everything which is suggested by chance or the importunity of men. To save the world requires sometimes detachment from even the individuals that compose the world.

And I learn from this that Jesus with a set task to do will do it, and not attempt what lies beyond it—the secret of all success in work for God or man.

But as we catch a glimpse of the Lord's great mission, so patiently and so unwaveringly carried out, and as again we catch a glimpse of the pathetic necessity He felt for retirement and for rest, so constantly sought, and so frequently sought in vain, we are able to appreciate the graciousness, the heart of human pity, manifested in these two incidents of the Greek woman and the Greek man of Decapolis. He could not be hid away in the desert or in the crowded cities. Humanity was always finding Him. No sooner had He crossed the borders of Tyre than a woman, made resolute by love and humble by suffering, approached Him with the request that He would heal her little girl. There was no direct spiritual end to be gained by healing the child—in those corrupt and licentious towns of the coast there was as yet no foundation laid on which the Kingdom of God could be built. Dismiss all idea that He wished to preach to the woman. It is out of sheer love and pity,—in recognition of the insight which

made her call Him Lord, and admit that the children of the Covenant had a right to be first fed, in recognition of some spiritual quality in her, but with no secondary end,—out of sheer love and pity for the sorrowing mother, He who had come there to rest and to escape from man stirred Himself to lay hold of the abounding power of God, and to draw down on the suffering child the resources that were meant just then for Israel alone.

And it is the same story with this deaf man at Decapolis. In some unnamed town or village, as He passed through the populous and busy country, the fame of the Great Physician brought to Him a Greek who was deaf and could not speak properly. The scene is unusually vivid, even for St. Mark. There is the multitude of curious observers who were always ready for excitement; and there is the poor afflicted creature, who can hear nothing, and if he tries to speak only babbles in inarticulate speech; and there is Jesus longing for rest, and confronted here as everywhere by the great tide of human woe. He takes the sufferer apart, leads him away into a by-road, an open place in the field, a cleft in the rock, you know

not where; but He must be alone with him, He and the disciples who are privileged to accompany Him. When He has got the maimed and useless creature to Himself He is all hands, and mouth, and eyes, and ears to impress and to save the ruined human body. Into the deaf ears go His fingers, and with the saliva from His own tongue He touches that faltering tongue, and then looks up to heaven, the unfailing source of all His miraculous power, and He breathes a sigh—is it a sigh of pity for the sufferings of men, or is it a sigh of relief that the Deliverer is so near at hand? Then in His own familiar Aramaic speech—for, of course, it does not matter whether the man understands Him or not as he is deaf, and the word is only spoken as a sign and symbol to the disciples who are near—He says to the deaf man, “Ephphatha!” and the man’s mouth speaks and his ears hear. In the former healing in Decapolis, which was recorded in the fifth chapter, He bade the patient go and tell in his home what things God had done for him. On this occasion the old motive for keeping silence prevails afresh. The importunity of the sick, the foolish stare of the curious, the press of the

multitude—these are hindrances which quite outweigh the advantages of such confession as is contained in the closing verse of the chapter.

The eighth chapter begins with a passage which is the replica of one that we have already studied. In the desert on the east of the lake He feeds a multitude of those who have come to listen to Him. You may gather, I suppose, that He frequently did such things, and that the two chance stories that have come to us in detail represent a constant activity of His ministry. He was one of those who never could see hungry people without the heart beating and the hand reached out. But this incident is selected from among the rest evidently with a view of preparing us for the scene in verse fourteen, where the constant disheartening misunderstanding of His disciples is presented to us afresh.

You must realise now that He is back at the lake. He has traversed Decapolis, and the days of His rest, such as they were, are at an end. Directly He is back at the lake He is confronted by those wearisome representatives of Jewish orthodoxy and piety—the Pharisees. Their catch-cry now is that they want a sign,

and we may be thankful that they made that request, for, foolish as it was, it teaches us a lesson. Here were men living in the presence of what you call the miraculous activities of Jesus, seeing the wonders that were done, and they wanted a sign ! We who will not believe, let us learn, should be equally incredulous were all the wonders of God displayed before our eyes. No miracle can convert the heart that is not converted by Jesus without miracles. You could not see, though all the heavens were bared, if you do not see this Jesus whom you are studying here. A sign ? No sign can be given to men who do not see a sign in the evident power of the Spirit, in the love and compassion of God, in the purpose to save a world that is lost, in the purity and truth of this Man whose heart is open to His Father, to whom and through whom the Father speaks in everything that He says and does. I believe that Jesus is saying to-day—I trust He is saying it to this generation of English people, “There shall no sign be given to this generation. If it cannot understand Jesus by Himself it must go without understanding Him.”

Now this spiritual denseness of the Pharisees, combined, we may suppose, with some fresh onset of the Herodians in one of those Greek cities where Herod was the titular king, led Him to speak, when He entered the boat again to cross the water to Bethsaida, in His figurative way. The gist of what He said, of course, must be plain to you all. It was this: That the habit of mind which does not notice goodness but is all for miracles, the habit of mind which sees no proof of God in truth, but will test everything by mouldy formulæ; the habit of mind which thinks that the kingdom of God itself is a kind of superior Herod's Court, where the courtiers are flattered and flattering, and the dignitaries sweep past in magnificent robes; the habit of mind which conceives the kingdom as a Jewish Empire dominating the world in place of the Roman empire; in a word, the habit of mind which produces in every generation, on the one hand, a dead orthodoxy, and, on the other hand, an external catholicism, that habit of mind is, as He said, the leaven, the leaven of evil, destroying the very inward thought of Christ. I see Him there in the boat sitting apart, and making this reflection to Himself.

rather than addressing the disciples: "The leaven of the Pharisees and of the Herodians!" I see the fishermen huddled together in the boat; they have only a single loaf for the food of them all, and they listen with closed ears, and with a dense materialistic heart. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod! He means, we suppose, that we have not brought bread enough." Incredible misunderstanding! He had opened the deaf ears; presently he will open the blind eyes; but it would seem that these souls, these chosen friends, these upon whom the hope of all the world depends, could not be taught either to hear or to see, but were intrinsically blind and deaf.

Now to those who reflect and are capable of entering into the pathos of a great soul amongst common souls, this passage will sound the most moving and tragic in all the story that we have yet encountered in this Gospel. Never to be understood! Never to have a friend intelligent enough to grasp the great ideas which were seething in His mind! Where by His grace and goodness He had won love and reverence, still to discover this crass insensibility—an insensibility

which systematically takes every parable He frames as if it were literal, and turns every plain statement He utters into a parable. This insensibility of men who have no eyes, no ears, and no souls as it seems, that was the daily crucifixion of Jesus, and it is the crucifixion which He still suffers even in the house of His friends. There is no word more constant upon His lips to-day than "Is it possible! Do you not yet understand?"

But the ship touches the beach at Bethsaida, and it seems as if He turns from the spiritual blindness of His followers to the physical blindness of a man who is brought to Him with a sense of intense relief, as if He were saying under His breath all the time, "Impossible as yet to open these fast-closed spiritual eyes; let Me at least heal someone; let this welling tide of suffering love within Me find some outlet, however humble." I think He welcomes this blind man. It is a comfort to *do* something when the mind is shocked and disappointed. And it was a beautiful thing to do.

I like to think what that blind man saw when for the first time his eyes were open. From the shore of Bethsaida on the western side of the

lake, he would see, just before him, the glittering waters bounded by the shore where the basaltic hills opened to let the Jordan in, and beyond and above, the great snowy dome of Hermon in the blue heavens—a vision which might have suggested to John the Theologian the description of the sea of glass and the river of the waters of life and the great white throne. It was a great thing to open the eyes of a single blind man to see such sights. He healed him readily and tenderly. He healed him on the principle—one of the most blessed principles of human life, illustrated constantly by our Lord—that you should do in hours of disappointment the duty that lies nearest to you, distasteful or not; and though it seem a common thing, it shall come out in the after-days as a mighty work for God. For what is the meaning of that deed that was done at Bethsaida? It opened the blind eyes of a man. Yes; but we, reading it, think nothing of the miracle, think nothing of the blind man. It all seems burdened with a spiritual meaning for us, a message which I trust none of us can miss. The blind man caught no glimmer of it, be sure. He was all-absorbed in the beauty of the

landscape and the rapture of seeing. But what a lesson it was! Turn your eyes to the description, and ask, "How does it stand with us all?" When we are first brought to Jesus we are blind; we do not see His face, we hardly believe that He exists, because blindness shuts Him out. I have met with many young people who do not believe that Jesus lives, and have no idea that He is in the presence of His people—suppose Him to be a strange myth of a bygone day, a vision which flitted before the eyes of the past, and then faded, simply leaving a sweet but ineffectual memory. We come to Jesus blind, and then He takes us by the hand and leads us apart out of the village and the busy hum of men. The seclusion of the soul with Jesus in the early approaches before we understand or believe is so sweet that some look back upon that first step in religion as the very happiest period in their life. Then comes His miraculous touch, and a strange thrill goes through the soul, and we cry, "Then He lives and is near; that was His breath I felt; He is real; not a distant dream, but a present Saviour." And He is asking, "Do you see?" Yes, we at least see

dimly that He is there. It is that blurred, luminous tumult of sight when the things of the Spirit are manifestly there, though not yet manifest. "Yes! we see a little, Lord!" And then comes another touch, and, with some of us, another, and another, and another, week after week, month after month, year after year, still another, and another, and another. Day dawns slowly; we do not tread securely in these dim shadows of the spirit-world, and He, though real, seems only in the Spirit; we do not know Him yet, though we know He is there. Little by little the vision clears, and the man gains strength, and the life forms on the basis of a present Lord, and the soul is knit with Him until His presence is as real as our own, and much more real than anyone's else, and you look up.

Lord, I was blind; I could not see
In Thy marred visage any grace;
But now the beauty of Thy face
In radiant vision dawns on me.

Little by little He leads us to the point where we know Him and He knows us, and then He tells us to go, not into the village, the booths of Vanity Fair, where all is hubbub and dis-

turbance, and life is confused and dim, and goes down to darkness; but He bids us go to the home—the home, the household of God, the bosom of His Church. Go to the home, He says, and in that home learn how you may teach. “Neither go into the town, nor tell it to any in the town, but go to the home.”

X.

THE CRISIS.

(MARK VIII. 27—IX. 1.)

THE CRISIS.

IN a Greek tragedy the point where the action was fully developed and the catastrophe came in sight was called the *Peripeteia*. At that point the attention of the audience was breathless as the burden of the piece slid into their hearts. The passage of St. Mark's Gospel which is now before us (viii. 27—ix. 1) might be called the *Peripeteia* of the story. The solemn significance of it is only hidden from our eyes because we always set out to read it with the conclusion or the discovery already in our minds. But let us turn back for a moment and observe what the action of the drama has been.

Jesus came from Nazareth to the Jordan, and at the baptism He became distinctly aware of the heavenly mission on which He had been sent. He then proceeded to gather

about Him a few friends who might, as it were, see Him and judge for themselves. He did not tell them who or what He was. No word was breathed upon the subject. A few people—chiefly demoniacs, persons in an abnormal condition—had recognised Him and had called out to Him, “Thou art the Son of God,” but He had quickly silenced them. He was determined to have no witness of that kind; and in all His deeds of charity we have repeatedly observed that His main purpose seemed to be to silence the talk, to prevent premature disclosure, to check the tendency which existed on every side to make the Messiahship depend upon miraculous powers. “No sign should be given,” He said. And no one should call Him Christ because of the miracles that were done. And yet, all along, by His teaching of the multitude, by His deeds of mercy, by the hours of solitary communion, when He called His disciples apart for a while, His one object evidently had been to touch their conscience, to open their eyes, that they might of their own accord perceive who He was. His surprise was sometimes expressed that they were so slow

to perceive, that they "did not yet understand."

Now, at last, the *Crisis* had come, where the little circle of "His own" obtained at last a clear perception of one stupendous fact. Peter's answer, "Thou art the Christ," should be printed in larger type on the page of the Gospel. It is the centre and the pivot of the whole story. Everything has led up to this from the opening verse. This is the summit, the mountain of transfiguration, and from this point we shall observe that the whole tone of His speech changes. He leads His disciples down from the summit into the valley of shadows and death. It appears as if He had waited until they recognised Him and confessed Him, and directly the confession was assured, He hastened to disclose to them the fate, the terrible doom, that awaited Him. For it is a tragedy, this story of the Gospel, and its peripeteia cannot but command our close attention, our breathless interest.

We are first of all tempted to paint the scene in which the crisis is placed. He and the disciples had again left the borders of Galilee, and had come into the neighbourhood of Cæsarea-

Philippi, a town which lay in one of the lovely and fertile valleys among the lower slopes of Mount Hermon. It was at that time one of the most brilliant in the land, a city of great temples and basilicas and colonnades, after the familiar patterns of Græco-Roman architecture. Not far from the city rose a limestone cliff, a hundred feet in height, from a cavern in the face of which issued the waters of the Jordan, the river the streams whereof should make glad the city of God. The position was in a sense the key of Palestine. In 198 B.C. the Egyptian army, under Scopas, had there been defeated by Antiochus the Great, and the victory had thrown open the whole land to the conqueror. These indications of locality may, it is true, be accidental, but how curiously significant they are! From this point was to issue a river of ever-widening and ever-deepening confession that would flow right onward to the New Jerusalem, the city of God. And at this point was to be achieved the beginning of a conquest which would include not only Palestine, but all countries to the very ends of the earth. A few words coming from one of this little group of men who had crossed the

border from Galilee into this alien land, a few words spoken from the heart, were to form a foundation of the Church—a Church which would defy the ages, and against which the gates of hell should not prevail. The words were spoken by Peter, and Peter was the mouthpiece of the rest. The words were spoken in this alien land amongst a people of a non-Jewish race and faith, as if to indicate, what proved to be the fact, that Christ would reach His own people of Israel through the conquest of the Gentile world. Peter confesses the Messiah. They could not have lived with Him as they had without ultimately making the discovery. They had heard the astonishment of the multitude, declaring that no one spoke as He did in that teaching, which welled out fresh and perennial, like the waters of the Jordan issuing from the great cavern in the neighbouring cliff. They had heard in Decapolis the alien people declaring with admiration, “Why, He has done all things well!” But they had seen Him more intimately than the multitude. They had marked Him when the waves grew calm at His word; their hands had distributed the mysteriously multiplied loaves among the multi-

tude; they had watched Him in the presence of disease and death; they had felt, as it were, the throb of His heart; they had noticed His unfailing patience and pity; they had drawn an inference which even duller minds could have drawn; there could be no doubt about it. They had pierced the veil of His humility, a disguise easily penetrated by faith and love; they had found out who He was. Yes, this was He who was to come. The paradoxes of the prophets seemed as if they could refer to no single man; but here was one in whom they met and were harmonised. The disciples were prepared at last, when the occasion offered, to say through their mouthpiece, "We have come to the conclusion that you are the Messiah that was to come. We think that you are the hope of Israel, the Saviour of the world."

But we must pass to another point. In vain should we try to estimate the emotions with which these simple companions of Jesus made and avowed that strange discovery; but they have themselves in this record given a curious illustration of their blindness, the limitation of their understanding which prevented them from really perceiving the gist of the confession

which they had made. For when He proceeded to speak to them about death and suffering, they blankly denied and discredited the very Christ whom they had confessed. Possibly they had a very imperfect knowledge of the Scriptures that foretold the Messiah. Possibly, with the traditional reverence of Jews for those who sat in Moses' seat, they could not credit that the leaders of the people would kill the Messiah when He came. Whatever may have been the reason, the fact of it, as here recorded, is singularly instructive. The man who has just confessed Christ proceeds to rebuke Him, and receives from the lips of Christ a word of reproach and condemnation unexpectedly severe. He is called the great adversary, Satan; he is told to be gone, for his mind is earth-bound and blind to the things of God. It is a melancholy passage, but yet it throws light upon the character of Jesus. It throws light, also, upon the difficulties with which He had to contend; and I think it brings us to-day a little gleam of consolation and hope.

It throws light upon His character, for how amazingly frank He is! He does not hesitate to call the one man who has confessed Him,

Satan. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Jesus, let us be thankful, is incapable of flattery. Dear human heart, how you are always thirsting for praise! How eager you are to be soothed and flattered, how you shrink from the rough tongue of truth! When you have had a visitation of religion in your heart, when you have done a deed that may possibly be acceptable in God's sight, how you wait like a child for the applause and approval of God! How little you know that approbation, and still more adulation, is a sweet poison that will ruin you! Do not be offended at the pitiless severity of Jesus; be thankful that He never flatters. It is His love which makes Him turn upon us and call us Satan, and send the shattering charge home to our heart until we tremble before Him. It is His love which makes us realise through His charge how truly we do not savour of the things of God, but of the things of earth.

But the episode brings out also the difficulties with which He had, and has, to contend in dealing with such creatures as we are. How slowly does He win from us the faintest confession of the heart! Through what long years

He had to strive with some of you before He could ever get a single word of confession from your lips; and then, when after long years He has got one simple, candid confession that you believe in Him and call Him Christ your Saviour, the next moment you say something, you do something, which jars His righteous soul to the very centre. He will perceive the contraction of view, the opinionated judgment, the coldness of heart, which makes the very confession appear to be a mockery, and makes Him almost seem to reproach you for having called Him Christ. He has to say, "Get you behind me, Satan; for you do not savour of the things of God." I wonder, you must often wonder, my brother, that our Lord has not had enough of us long ago, and given us up as hopeless and intractable!

But there is a comfort and a hope in the episode. For this poor blundering fisherman, having after all an honest heart, became in the end a true disciple. He cherished these words against himself; he got them recorded in the Gospel of Mark, if it be true that Mark is the penman of St. Peter. And he ultimately died, if the tradition be correct, on the cross

with his head downwards, for the Christ whom he confessed and then denied. It is full of consolation and hope for you and me. We are unworthy disciples at present; but courage, there is yet time. If we can cleave to our confession, and with brave, bold lips say, "Thou art the Christ," and live in it and die for it, we may yet be acceptable in His sight, as Peter was. Not as if we had already attained or had done anything at all; let the past be forgotten, but let us hope that we may grow to be His disciples indeed. "Thou art the Christ."

But lastly, there is something worse even than the offence that the Christ should suffer. The Christian is to suffer too. Did ever a religious teacher, anxious to obtain disciples, speak like this before? He called the multitude—a mixed company of Jews and Greeks, we must suppose; He had something to say to them. He wished to explain to them that to confess Him would involve shame and trouble, to follow Him would be to take up a cross and possibly to die upon it—life might be the price of service. This was the nature of His explanation. There would be a future victory, true. The Son of Man would come in the glory of

His Father, with the holy angels. Then those who had been ashamed of Him He would be ashamed of. That glory should even in a few days be so far anticipated that the chosen three should behold it. All that was true, but in the main His call was a summons to the cross, and in giving that call He uttered one thought, the brilliance of which is so startling that on the strength of this alone I would hail Him as Lord and God. He pierced to the very secret of human nature, which hardly any of us understand. We think, we always think, that what men want is ease and comfort and self-indulgence, and we try to shape religion to suit that ridiculous demand. We make it respectable; we make it profitable; we offer through it the means of preferment. I have heard people say that the Church could never exist if you took away its endowments. I have heard others say that there must be some recognition given to those who follow Christ; let there be social distinction attaching to it; religion would die out unless the upper classes countenanced it and belonged to it; and we try to shape and wrest and eliminate, to meet this imaginary demand of the world. Christ offers a cross,

and the possible joy of laying down your life for Him, surrender absolute, complete, and final. Which knows men best, we or He? He, undoubtedly. We are always forgetting that men are the stuff out of which heroes are made. He never forgets it. We are always forgetting that men in their hearts are eager for noble deeds, longing for sacrifice, asking for some leader, some teacher, who will show them, not the inglorious paths of ease and self-indulgence, but the aspiring path of suffering and the cross and death. He never forgets it. He knew what was in man; He knew that underneath this coward nature of ours lies material of another kind—the very Sonship of God. He could appeal to it, knowing what was in us. You say men are selfish. We *are* selfish, but we do not want to be. What we are longing for more than all other things on earth is to get the self—the ugly self we hate—crucified. We want a way by which the self may die, and we may begin to live. We want the cross; He knew it, and He invited us to take up the cross and find the way. The Captain of our Salvation—Himself made perfect through suffering—calling us to a whole-

hearted surrender to Him, a life of strenuous battle, of climbing up the starry ways, a life which gives rather than gets, and surrenders rather than seeks—that is the life we want. I dare to say that in the heart of you every one of you wants such a life. You can respond to that, your heart aglow.

There is the true Christian! He takes his staff in hand and binds his garment round his thighs; he meets foes by the way; the sword flashes out and he deals deadly blows; he falls but rises again; and he presses towards victory!

I ask you, do you want comfort, do you want respectability, do you want self-indulgence? Well, then, do not talk about Christ, do not think you are His; you have no part nor lot with Him, for He says, "Whosoever will be My disciple, let him take up his cross and follow Me." He is speaking to us in these days of pleasure-seeking and self-indulgence, the Lord whom we profess to serve. I hear His voice; I think you must hear it, too. It is not a distant voice in a far past; it is pressing and urgent and loud in the heart of us all: "Deny yourself, and come and follow Me." "Con-

fess Me with your lips; avow your discipleship." Oh, my brethren, if only you would, if we as a Church would take up our cross and follow Him!—if with a united voice we would say, "Thou art the Christ, and Thee we follow for ever," even we might not taste of death till we saw the Kingdom of God coming with power. May He move upon us and impel us to that surrender and confession and service!

XI.

THE CARTOON OF THE TRANS-
FIGURATION.

(MARK IX.)

THE CARTOON OF THE TRANS- FIGURATION.

It was no doubt with the instinct of interpretation which is often the gift of great artists that Raphael, in the famous Vatican picture, combined on one canvas the Transfiguration on the mountain-top and at the mountain's foot the group of disciples around the suffering boy. For the world's troubles and the world's transports are generally included in one picture, and the Saviour's transcendent glory is indissolubly bound up with the pain and the passion and the despair of man. But whether consciously or not, the Evangelist St. Mark obtained a larger lesson by including more in the canvas of this chapter. The scene which is presented is only understood if you take it altogether, and study its parts in relation to the whole.

Assuming that the Transfiguration occurred

on one of the spurs of Mount Hermon, in the neighbourhood of Cæsarea Philippi, the scene includes the road which went between the mountains for five-and-twenty miles from Cæsarea to Capernaum at the north-west corner of the Sea of Galilee; and each episode that occurred along that route has its distinct place in the whole picture.

Let us try for a moment to paint this picture before our eyes, and then, I think, there will be time to look at its main incident a little more closely.

Suppose that from some vantage-point of the upper air we can see the whole landscape. There is the snowy crown of Hermon in the north, and the road winding southwards by Lake Merom. First of all we fix our eyes on this lower ridge or shoulder of Hermon. We should remember that at Cæsarea the disciples had just made the first confession that Jesus was the Christ, and, on the strength of that, He had begun to explain to them for the first time that as the Christ He would have to suffer; He had told them that death awaited Him, and travail and persecution awaited them. Now, when men confess Christ—and not before—

they begin to see His glory; they are admitted up the mountain where the Transfiguration takes place before their eyes. We see, therefore, in this landscape the three men—Peter, who had confessed, and James and John, who seemed to be his spiritual brothers—taken up the mountain to see their Lord transfigured. It is a great thing to recognise who Jesus is through the veil of His humility, to be able not only to penetrate the peasant's garb, but what Shakespeare would have called "the muddy vesture of decay," and to discover that He was indeed God manifested in the flesh. When men have come to that point of insight where they can discern, through His humanity, who He is, they are then ready to go further, and discover something of that nature which was for a little while covered with the tabernacle of the flesh.

While we watch these three go up to understand the Lord whom they had confessed, we see at the foot of the mountain the nine disciples who were behind the rest in insight, apprehension, and courage. How far they were behind we gather from their baffled

and puzzled expression. They are confronted by a suffering boy, such as they had often seen before, such as they had seen their Master cure with one of His marvellous touches, or one of His authoritative words. But they have learnt nothing yet, they have not discovered that "this kind goeth out by prayer." In vain the distracted father appeals to them. In their Master's absence they are as powerless as the distracted father himself. Until He, who is up there unseen upon the mountain, comes down, nothing can be done.

And we see Him descend from that lofty point of preparation and revelation in order that He may attend to the wants of a poor sick child.

He heals the child. Then He enters on the road to travel towards Capernaum with His disciples, and we begin to observe how little they have understood—even the three who had been up the mountain with Him; for in the light of what had happened there He begins to explain to them that not only must He die and die shamefully, but He must rise again. And they are bewildered, they could not understand, and they were afraid

to ask; I suppose because having seen so much they did not like to confess that they understood so little. Nor is that by any means the extent of their perversity.

We watch them walking down that beautiful road, a little group of men busily talking; and apart, in silence, the Master going on before. We come near to hear the nature of their talk. They are engaged in a dispute as to which of them is the greatest. The three, we presume, who had gone up the mountain must be the greatest, and which of them? Peter, no doubt, because, as he says, "I was the first to confess." "But you were the man to whom He said, 'Get thee behind me, Satan.'" "And you were the man," says the other, "who uttered that inexpressibly foolish thing upon the mountain about the three tents." And not only the three are prepared to contest the place; all the nine have their claims. For you will find the very poorest tramp along the road has excellent reasons, if you will listen to him, why he should be Lord Chancellor, but for the grudging hostility of fate; he makes no question that he is fit to sit with the crowned heads of Europe. That is

their discussion, "Which of them should be greatest?"

Nor is even that the measure of their perversity. For it seems, as they passed along and the Master was ahead, they had in some way encountered a man who was trying to do work in the name of Jesus; and they had promptly repressed him because he did not follow with them. Here is a lesson for us. These vainglorious men, this faithless generation, who could not for the life of them cure the sick boy, if they can do no direct good themselves, at least can stop someone else from trying to do it. There is the radical disease of an unregenerate Church, a disease which appeared at the very beginning. Directly apostles are called they are puffed up with the importance of their office, and their idea seems to be that if they cannot save the world they can at any rate crush out dissent; they will at least forbid all those who do not follow with them; and if they hear of a man doing anything in the name of their Master, it shall be a penal charge against him that he has dared to work for Christ if he worked not in their way. What a long

descent it seems from that high mountain of transfiguration down to this pettiness, this bickering, this ludicrous vanity of the unteachable fishermen!

But the picture is not yet complete. For they have now reached the town of Capernaum and have entered the house, and when they are in the house you will see Him who was just now transfigured on the mountain-top, who received the high witness of heaven that He was the beloved Son of God, finding out a little child from the street or the house, and putting him in the midst of His disciples, to see if with such a text he can teach these men, whom the Transfiguration cannot teach, something of the inner meaning of God. That is the true counterpart, the companion picture, of the Lord transfigured upon the mount—that plain and simple man with His arms folded round a little child, the child pressed to His heart, teaching His disciples the lessons that follow. I should like us to learn these lessons if it were possible. Will you glance over them as I try hurriedly to expound them? He beckons to them, caressing the child in His arms; and this is what He says

to them*: "That ambition of yours always to be first, always to be greatest, it is your ruin. For in order to receive the Kingdom of God you must be like this little child, who thinks of nothing less than being great or being first. Unless you become like this little child you cannot enter the Kingdom of God. This egotism, this self-assertion, this restless desire to be something, and to be recognised by men, swells you to such proportions that you cannot push in at the narrow gate of the Kingdom."

I can imagine no lesson more impressive than this, that He whom we just now saw shining in the glory of heaven should fold to His heart a child, and hasten to explain that this was the nearest similitude He could find to the heaven to which He belonged and the kingdom which He had come to found.

Yes! But there is something more that He has to say to them. It is a rebuke which they had brought on by their own confession. They had silenced the man who was working

* I have ventured to transpose ix. 37 and x. 15, because, both being words of Jesus, it is evident that they fit in better if their places are changed.

in His name. He has got to say, with the little child in His arms, what is the lasting condemnation of the exclusiveness of the Church that is called by His name, a condemnation written beforehand, that the Church should be without excuse. "You forbad that disciple, did you? You did wrong. He was not following with us, did you say? But was he speaking in My name? Then that was following with us; that was to be of your company, if your company is My company. For supposing it had been a far humbler service than healing a demoniac—if it had been simply giving a cup of cold water in My name, I should count him as My disciple, and he should in no wise lose his recompense in the Kingdom of Heaven. Do you see what you were doing when you silenced him? He was one of My little ones—such an one as this little child; he was precious to Me; he was beginning to work in faith; he would have grown; he would have become a servant whom we could all recognise and love; and you silenced him! Traitors, do you throw a stumbling-block in the way of one of My little ones? It were better for you that a

millstone were hung about your neck and you were cast into the lake yonder and drowned in the depths of the sea. Your prejudice, your intolerance, your exclusiveness! Though they are your very eye, your very hand, your very foot, it were better if you plucked out your eye, and cut off your hand, your foot, and entered into life blind and halt and maimed, than, having all these, to be plunged into the Gehenna of fire! You do not seem to understand," He goes on, "you do not notice that these are the things which form that fire. The bigot, the persecutor, the inquisitor, it is he that is doomed to the worms and the fire! What? You and your successors, you will light the fires to burn heretics? You will establish My kingdom by cruelty and persecution? Yes! It will be your own fires you will light, and the worm that consumes will consume you and not the persecuted. Every one of that kind shall be salted indeed; but not with salt, with fire; and fire burns! Yes! You who are chosen as the salt of the earth, whom I have chosen, if this spirit of intolerance and persecution is to grow, you shall be salted with fire! Learn," He says, "and learn in time, that the

salt may be preserved. And be at peace with one another. For the Church grown bitter, exclusive, condemnatory, ambitious, and proud, shall be the first to suffer, and shall suffer worst." This is how He speaks to them—He who was transfigured before their eyes—His arms thrown round a little child.

The scene, the sweep of events, is so striking that we were obliged to picture it as a whole at the very beginning, without waiting to examine the details of this great passage. But there is one point on which it is necessary to say a single word. I want you to observe the significance of what happened on the Mount in the eyes of those three who were chosen. I want you to escape the danger presented by the peculiar tone of scepticism current to-day which would have you believe that the whole scene was an illusion, the hallucination of excited witnesses; would have you suppose that no such Transfiguration took place because no such Transfiguration does take place amongst us to-day. Now, we have indeed vainly studied the character and the life of Jesus in this, the first Evangelist, unless we have come to perceive that He was

not such as we are. That He was man is evident, but He was man so interpenetrated with God that all His life was, as it were, Divine. The human nature was but a tabernacle in which the Divine nature dwelt. It could afford no surprise to any one who had observed him if at some point or other the material of the tabernacle became transparent, and the nature of the occupant were made known. It was not His purpose that any one should come to believe in Him by such marvellous transformations, by that which would stir the wonder or excite the curiosity of vulgar minds. He wished no one to speak about this until the end; He would not have valued a faith that rested simply upon this; He was determined that men should believe upon Him because of those moral and spiritual qualities in Him which were all Divine. By no miracle would He overpower the judgment of men, by nothing extraordinary, as we call things extraordinary, did He mean to convince the world. He would stand before us in perfectness of character indeed, and He would wait to see whether we have eyes to perceive that He is the Son of God. And when we perceive it—

not till then—He can take us up the Mountain of Transfiguration and show us, as it were, in the secret of the soul who He is.

But the meaning of it all? Let us not pass by the precise place that it holds in the story of St. Mark. He has just been acknowledged by a few men to be the Christ; He has just told them that as the Christ He is going to die. He descends this mountain, as we shall soon see, to start upon the final journey to Jerusalem, where His death is to be accomplished; and here on this mountain-top, this central place in the history of His life, He wishes distinctly to state His connection with those others who were eternally associated with mountain-tops—the prophets of the old *régime*, who had seen His day and worked for its coming, and had been in many essential senses the condition on which His coming depended. Like beacon fires flashing good news from neighbouring hills, these sons of the mountain-tops connect the widely-scattered incidents of the Divine plan—Sinai and Nebo, Horeb and Carmel. With this spur of Hermon, lordlier than all, and this transfigured Man greater than all, are united, Moses, who died on Nebo 1,500 years before,

and Elijah, who 850 years before had heard the still small voice on Horeb. These are links in the long chain of the redemptive purpose.

Now, it is only those of us who understand what mountains are that will see the peculiar symbolism of this connection. I suppose it is not every one who has had the opportunity of making the discovery. When, after a toilsome climb, you stand upon some high point and command the whole country, and into the tingling blood comes a sense of exultation and of power, a thrill of rapture never known to those who remain below, life and thought gain something which is never obtained from any other experience. These high places of the earth, with their rarified air, seem as it were contiguous to the very portals of heaven, and on that elevation we are more pressed into the spiritual and eternal than on the flat ground below. There is a region of the spirit which you may call the mountain-tops of human life; it is a point high up, it is a place sometimes difficult to climb, but at that point heaven and earth meet. It is like the seventh heaven, and when a man climbs it he sees unutterable things which he could

not speak of to those below. He finds there the Transfigured Lord—Him whom men doubted—grown more real than men themselves. And all the mystery of His Divine nature and His incarnation breaks in upon the mind as the great explanation of life and of the world. In that lofty communion He begins to gather strength to grasp the strong Son of God, and, understanding Him, he is able to come down and follow Him to the Cross—knowing who He is and what must be the meaning of the death He is about to die. It is that symbolism of the mountain-top which gives the inner feeling of the Transfiguration, and it leaves us with the question haunting our minds, “Do we know anything of these upper regions of the spirit? Has our faith passed into experience and contact with the Divine? Have we seen Jesus transfigured before our eyes?”

Lord, it is good for us to be
Here on the Holy Mount with Thee.
When darkling with the depths of night,
When dazzled with excess of light,
We bow before the heavenly voice
That bids bewildered souls rejoice :
Though love wax cold, and faith grow dim,
“This is My Son! Oh, hear ye Him.”

XII.

THE ASCENT TO THE ALTAR

(MARK x. 13—31; 46—52; 32—45.)

THE ASCENT OF THE ALTAR.

JESUS with the little band of followers, who, notwithstanding all their limitations and imperfections, had at any rate confessed His name and seen a glimpse of His glory, travels through the familiar region of His early training and beneficent ministry to the capital of His nation. He goes by the route beyond Jordan, and crosses the river by the fords near Jericho, where the host of Israel had originally entered the promised land. He then climbs up the steep path from the City of Palms to Jerusalem, which, like a High Altar, stands 3,000 feet above the level of the river. He approaches the city as an Altar, with the full determination to offer a sacrifice upon it, and with the clear knowledge that the sacrifice will be Himself. Ever since Peter's confession in the eighth chapter (verses 27—29), this sacrifice had been the frequent subject of His conversation, and long before, we may be certain, it had occupied His thoughts.

The six chapters that follow upon this correspond in a manner to the *Phædo* of Plato. As that dialogue presents Socrates serenely and triumphantly confronting death, this passage marks the aspect, the manner, the deeds, the words, of Jesus under the shadow of His own Cross. The present chapter might almost be designed to present us with a portrait of Him on the eve of His sufferings. The portrait is produced by seven traits, which are rendered in seven episodes. We must glance at these episodes in succession, in order that we may see the points of character contained in them, and may understand how they combine in that matchless person.

1. The *first* of them is contained in the twelve verses, which show us that as He entered the ancient territory of Judea, His discourse turned upon the marriage tie—the indissoluble bond which binds together man and wife. Filled as He was with the writings of the ancient prophets, we cannot doubt that His mind was thinking of the prophet Hosea, and the constant theme of that prophecy which represents God as the husband of His people, and His people as the rebellious and unfaithful wife. For we

remember that everything on earth in the eyes of Jesus rested upon the Eternal Being of God—the sanctity of marriage, the sanctity of the family life, the sanctity of the individual life, were all based upon God. After Him all families in heaven and earth are named, the Father and the Husband, the Creator, Inspirer of all His creatures. The thought, then, in the mind of Jesus was essentially that which is expressed in Shakespeare's familiar sonnet:

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediment. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out ev'n to the edge of doom.

This Saviour of men was determined to "bear it out even to the edge of doom."

2. But the second trait occurs in the episode of the children brought to Him by their parents (verses 13—16). You will remember that in the previous chapter the apostles had had to listen to a very humiliating discourse, of which the text had been a little child; and, as if instinctively, they now try to keep little

children out of His reach; they do not want to listen to another sermon of that description. And this attempt to keep the children away from Him gives occasion to one of His rare outbursts of anger. To receive children, He says—you must turn to chapter ix. 37, rather than the passage in the text*—to receive children is to receive Him, and to receive Him is to receive God; to reject children is to thrust from yourself the Kingdom of God. It has, I believe, generally been recognised that the way in which we regard children is an indication of our character. One may be a good man, and yet, from some fault of temperament may not be attractive to little children, but it is very doubtful whether you can be a good man if little children are not attractive to you. At any rate, here remains the trait of our Master's character, that He found something sacred in them. "Of such," He said, "is the Kingdom of God." The tone and the temper of a little child are the condition of our entering into the Kingdom of God.

3. The third trait is given us in a very marvellous revelation of His humility (verses 17—

* Vid. p. 181.

22)—a humility combined with love; for love always flows out of a lowly heart, as the waters of the Jordan flow from the cave in the limestone cliff near Cæsarea. One comes to Him with a noble designation upon his lips, and addresses Him as “Good Master.” But He will not accept the title “Good.” Though He were the Christ, though He were the Son of God, though no language could exaggerate His supreme excellence, yet here He was a man self-emptied for the death of the cross, a man among men to suffer and to prevail; in His humiliation He would by no means allow a title and address which is appropriate only to the Eternal Godhead. Now, it is very strange, and it serves to reveal us to ourselves, that we have often found a difficulty in Christ’s repudiation of this title, as if we did not understand that modesty is a part of the perfect character, as if we could not see that the humility of the self-emptied Lord is lovelier than the arrogance of one who claims his titles to the full. And His modesty stands in a curious contrast with the self-confidence of one who had “kept all the commandments from his youth.” The opulence of Christ’s penury stands over against the

jejune poverty of the man who was so good and had such great possessions.

4. But this brings us to another trait of His character (verses 23—31). It led Him to give His opinion about wealth—about what is true and what is false wealth—it led Him to magnificently recognise those who against all appearances choose the true in preference to the false wealth. Now, here is again a fine indication of character. You might almost know what a man is if you know how he feels to children and what he thinks of money. It is a supreme indication of Christ's character; He has a holy horror of wealth. Now, when *we* condemn it, our condemnation is often conventional and unreal; most human beings who condemn it are people who have not got it, and there are few people who have got it that can even bear to hear any one else condemn it. Christ's condemnation is not conventional, it is genuine. He looks on it as one of the main dangers to the spiritual life; He sees in it a threat against the Kingdom of God. It enables us to understand why He often reduces His beloved to poverty, and it shows us how strangely misguided are those

who complain, because when they become followers of Christ He takes their wealth from them. He does it in all good faith, because He loves them. He does it because He desires our good, and with the gracious encouragement of a sovereign who is sending His subjects into an uncongenial place, He assures us of the realities when He takes away the semblances. What have they who have lost all? They have Him, and having Him they possess all things; they possess life, they hold eternal life in fee. "Hath He not always treasures, always friends," if I may quote Coleridge with an alteration.

Hath he not always treasures, always friends,
The Christ-like* man? Three treasures—love and light,
And calm thoughts regular as infant's breath;
And three firm friends, more sure than day and night—
Himself, his Maker, and the angel Death?

5. There is a fifth trait of His character in verses 45—52, which seem to be out of place, because the passage which follows in verse 32 shows that the journey from Jericho to Jerusalem had begun. As He left Jericho for the

* Coleridge says, "The good, great man," but he means the same.

ascent of the altar you may well suppose that His mind was pre-occupied with the great event which was coming. It was one of those occasions, like the presence of death in a house, or the imminence of some great business crisis, which justify us in repelling the intrusion of petty affairs. We are all obliged at times to say that we are engaged, and to decline great things, because we have in hand greater. We can, therefore, thoroughly sympathise with the people about Him just then, who thrust away this blind beggar and said that the importunity was out of place. It did seem an impertinence. He was going to save the world; and a blind beggar demands all His time and care. Now, here is the finest trait of character. A weaker man would have said with great civility, "I am busy about great things; let me alone." The weaker man goes on great occasions wrapped in the mantle of great thoughts, but He—He, the Saviour of men—is all at the disposal of the blind beggar. As if He had nothing else in hand, He is ready to listen to his request, and to do what is possible for him. He is going to save the world, He is to carry

out a purpose which affects the human race from the beginning to the end; the cross that He has to mount is the cynosure of every eye in the universe. There is the central point of history, and He is approaching it, and His great mind is filled with the thought of it; *and therefore* He can give His undivided attention to healing the blindness of a beggar by the way, and can win the man's perpetual affection by the readiness of His offer and the completeness of His gift.

6. But now, at verse 32, the ascent begins, and it is strangely like that primitive story of Isaac, ascending this same mountain with his father Abraham, though from the southern side of it. It is strangely like, but there is this great difference, that Jesus is absolutely aware of what is coming. He sees beforehand the treachery, the judgment, the derision, the scourge, and the cross. He treads as one who is aware of it all, and his firm, strong step, the workings of His face, and His whole aspect as He walks are so striking that those who are following are filled with amazement. A kind of fear falls upon them, as if they were saying, "What can it mean?" or "What

is in His mind? Look at His expression as He walks." And here again is a lovely trait in His character! It was impossible but that He should feel the great event; but for Him it was equally impossible to keep His beloved at a distance from Him. So He calls them to Him as He climbs the path, and tells them what is in His mind, shows them the tragedy of the soul, His apprehension of what is to be, the reason of His resolute approach to the Altar. There is a trait of character, that He takes into His confidence—such men!

7. For here is the final trait of His character in this chapter (verses 35—45) brought out distinctly by the foil of His two best and chosen disciples, James and John. He at this moment is all thought of sacrifice, all thought of laying down a life, as He puts it here, "a ransom for many"; He is occupied with ministering, He is revolving the baptism that He must be baptized with, and tasting the cup that He must drink. These two, after all they have seen—you recollect they were on the mount and saw Him transfigured—after all they have heard—you recollect He was talking to them in rebuke of the contention, who should be

greatest—these two find their sole interest in the Kingdom of God in the possibility that they themselves may mount a throne, and sit one on either hand of the King. They are all occupied with the thought of promotion and advancement for themselves. Impossible! I should have said, but that I know myself so well. We can step quite close to Jesus Christ, walk even in His way, and yet be thinking of ourselves all the time. But mark His character—the complete gentleness, the unreproachful pensive forbearance of His answer. After all, it was ignorance, He seems to say; these poor youths did not know that His throne was reached by suffering; they had not learned yet the hollowness of earthly lordships and dominions. When the first Roman missionary Augustine came into Britain, he thought to subdue the minds of the ancient British Church by the state and ceremonial of his ecclesiastical pomp; he little thought that the British Christians concluded from this very circumstance that he was not a follower of Christ. In the same way these two first disciples seemed to suppose that the victory of the kingdom would be obtained by sovereigns and pontiffs, by prelates and

dignitaries, and they wished to be among the number from the very first. He alone understood—and He was about to reveal His secret to them in Gethsemane and on Calvary—He alone understood that to be a servant, even a bond-servant—for in verse 44 it is *δοῦλος*, a slave—and to be a servant of all, is what is meant by being the first in the Kingdom of Heaven. As He speaks to these men, on the eve of His own great sacrifice, ascending the altar to die, He gives a perpetual warning to His misguided Church, that the lordship over His heritage, and the straining after authority in His society, is a vast and worldly delusion, the tendency which more than anything else puts men out of harmony with Him, and demonstrates that the society in which it occurs is not His Church and cannot be; for “the Son of Man came to be a minister, to give His life a ransom for many.”

Now, this portrait of Jesus, drawn in the seven traits, has a singular and undesigned completeness. What a tender and healing influence it sheds upon us, if these lineaments have risen up before our eyes and we have seen

Him just as He was before He died ! Breathing His blessing on the union of husband and wife ; breathing His blessing on the little children, whom He takes in His arms, putting His hand upon them ; sympathising with every one, loving the very man who would not sacrifice his paltry wealth in order to follow Him ; sympathising with these people who had forsaken their poor bits of property in order to walk in His steps and be His companions ; quick to the cry of distress, even though it be the cry from a blind beggar by the way ; patient with the selfish egotism of His disciples ; the very picture of all-embracing pity and love and tenderness.

And yet do you call Him effeminate ? And do you say this is less the picture of a man than of a woman ? Nay ! If ever there was manhood, it is here ; strength and nerve and character, such as the manliest of us might desire. He is capable of this sacred indignation against a heartless officialism that drives the children from His feet. He is entirely undazzled by the attractions of wealth—which I take to be the finest trait of manhood, as the opposite is the deepest degradation of character—entirely undazzled by the attractions of wealth, so that

without a moment's hesitation He sent away a rich young man, with all the possibilities of service which were in him, because he was not ready to give all he had to the poor. And if it is not enough to trace these signs of moral courage, think of the physical courage which shines through all this brave, deliberate, unflinching affront of the terrible death, foreseen and already tasted! Whom shall we call manly if not one who could walk in that serene and settled way to a terrible end for an unselfish cause? Such abounding love, a pity so tender for men, for the weak and the helpless, that you think for a moment it is all feminine! Such a marvellous insight into the realities of things, such a courageous rejection of the false for the true, such a nerve in facing suffering that you think it is all manhood—heroism. The clear vision, the sovereign calm, the unpretentious authority—like a king who proposes to come and dwell among the outcasts of his people, like a conqueror who has come to the conquered, not to slay them, but to be slain!

Let us meditate upon the picture, for that is the picture of one who is Divine. And all our

hope of character and life, of victory and entrance into the Kingdom of God depends upon Him whose portrait is before us, and who has cast the spell of His power upon the hearts that believe.

XIII.

THE CARTOON OF JERUSALEM.

(MARK XI.)

THE CARTOON OF JERUSALEM.

You know the feelings with which one approaches the metropolis of a great country. The rapid and inglorious entrance of the express train, rushing through a sightless tunnel, and drawing up at the covered platform, has somewhat taken the edge from that keen excitement which the traveller used to experience when, on horseback or in the coach, he mounted the intervening ridge and saw for the first time the tangled city at his feet. He could ride slowly through the spreading suburbs, and he had time to marshal his feelings. It might be he arrived in the early morning, and the expression would break from his lips :

Dear God! The very houses seem asleep,
And all that mighty heart is lying still.

Or it might be he arrived at nightfall, when the twinkling lamps seemed to make the city an earthly reflection of the spangled heavens. But whether he arrived in the pressure of the day

or in the quiet of the evening, the hum of life, the long roll, as it seemed, of a human sea, reminded him that he was approaching the centre of the nation's existence. There he would see the imperial tower which marked the assembling place of the National Senate, or the roofs of the palace where the king held his Court. There he would see the chambers where justice was administered, and the still nobler basilicas and temples where worship was celebrated. And there, he would know, in unpretentious buildings, were the heads, unseen and silent, that determined the destinies of myriads in the uttermost parts of the empire. Now, in the approach to a great capital you forget the units, and you can think only of the corporate life. The individuals are secondary; the city itself is an individual, a kind of queenly personage, seated upon her hills, or planted beside her waters, aware and conscious, answerable for the deeds of her citizens, clothed in the glory of their virtues, or humbled in the dust of their shame.

But if that is the feeling that everyone must experience in approaching a great city that is the head of the Empire, let us remember that

no capital of the nations—not Thebes or Ctesiphon in antiquity, not Alexandria or Rome in classical times, not London or Paris to-day—was ever invested with such mysterious significance, was ever so vividly personified, was ever so desired and execrated, so clothed with the weeds of mourning, or exalted in the passion of praise, so bedewed with tears, so anointed with oil, so chanted in song, as that city, Jerusalem, the city which was the capital of a nation, but was also the city of the Most High, the city to which the tribes of Israel went up, the city which was fondly believed to be the joy of the whole earth.

No person of Jewish blood could ever approach these walls without emotion, no person of Jewish blood could ever enter any of these gates without the strange thrill of being received and gathered into the bosom of his mother. Imagine, then, the emotion in the heart of Jesus Christ when He, for the first time (according to the representations of this Evangelist), saw Jerusalem!

The chapter forms a cartoon drawn in very simple outline and in very temperate colour of the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, and though our Evangelist loves the picturesque,

he does not permit our eye to rest upon those majestic walls which even in the decay of Jerusalem fascinate the traveller; he does not permit us even to see the stately pinnacles of the Temple, and the historic buildings which connected that generation with many generations that had gone before. To this Evangelist, with all his love of the picturesque, the city is only a spiritual city. He could only think of its inhabitants, not of its buildings. With the true instinct of every seer amongst men, he does not see the houses in the city, he only sees the life and the spirit of those who live there. Accordingly, his mind is occupied, and he occupies us, all the time with the thought of what these people were who lived in the city. Jesus is coming "to His own." He seems the counterpart of His ancestor David, who crossed the river at the same place, and entered the city doubtless by the same gate when he came back from exile. The King is coming to His own, and the question that is agitated in our minds is, how will "His own" receive Him? What will they say to Him? What will they do with Him? That, too, is the thought in His own mind as He approaches the city,

and accordingly He arranges for an entrance into the city which will be as it were a challenge and a test.

With His keen sense of the value of parables, and His understanding of the meaning of pageantry, He makes an appeal to the eye of Jerusalem by a spectacle which is consciously moulded upon the utterance of an ancient prophet. Every reader of that prophecy, and there would be no one in Jerusalem who had not read it or heard it a hundred times, would be immediately reminded that Jesus was silently appealing to the judgment of the city by making an entry of this kind. The words would immediately occur to them, the familiar passionate words, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, thy King cometh unto thee. He is just and having salvation, lowly and riding upon an ass, even upon a colt the foal of an ass!" Our Western minds are entirely unaccustomed to this symbolic mode of appeal. The modern parallels seem very commonplace when put side by side with this natural and instinctive poetry. The modern parallels, I suppose, would be a manifesto issued, placarded on the walls, or

circulated from hand to hand; a proclamation from an aspirant to the throne, in sounding terms, dictating the policy which was to be; or, in this day—our own prosaic day—it would be some stirring letter in the Morning Papers, to reach the intelligence of a city or a nation. We must not miss the meaning because, the ancient methods being so dissimilar to ours, the form of appeal is so remote from our experience. Let us try to distinctly see what the whole thing would mean to the men who saw it!

The carefully arranged procession would tell its own tale directly it began. When the people from the walls, or those who were crowding about the gates according to the wont of an Eastern city, observed the little cortege coming down the slope of Olivet, through the olive yards and across the Brook Kedron, then mounting the rock under the very battlements of the Temple, and passing in at the Sheep Gate, as if the Shepherd were, indeed, entering His fold, there would not be one that missed the significance of it. No words could make it plainer; it would at once explain itself. Every man who saw it—and if there were a few who could not

see, the words of the multitude would immediately inform them of it—would understand. “This man claims to be He that was to come; the Prophet from Nazareth, of whose deeds and words our ears have been full all these months past, has at last come up to the capital; He is coming in at the gate, and He is announcing distinctly, so that none of us can miss the meaning, that He regards Himself as the promised Messiah, the one of whom the prophets have spoken—approaching the city upon an ass, the foal of an ass—the King at whose coming the daughter of Zion was to rejoice.” *The claim to be Messiah was conveyed to Jerusalem in the form of the entry of Jesus.*

The reception accorded to His claim is presented in this chapter in no doubtful language. Every word and every action during that memorable week helps to interpret to us precisely the position. Put briefly it is this: Enthusiastic welcome from the populace, and unhesitating condemnation from the religious rulers of the people. The men of influence who sit in Moses’ seat, the men who were the brain and regulating will of the nation, at once decide against Him. They are convinced, let

us charitably suppose, that He is a mere pretender, and they set themselves against the will of the populace. They do not do it openly, for they fear the people; they are only a handful among a multitude; but they proceed with that subtlety which is the sole instrument of government at the disposal of an oligarchy, and they determine that the man who claims to be the Christ shall die.

Now, there is subject for everlasting teaching in this picture, and we must not confine ourselves to its historical significance. It means just as much to-day as it did then.

I. Let us observe for a moment *the enthusiasm of the people*. Our evangelist, St. Mark, has taken pains from the first to show that the common people of Galilee were attracted by Jesus. He was such an one as the toilers must necessarily welcome; His whole method of work was precisely adapted to them; the sympathetic touch of His hand that always sought to heal and to feed before He taught, His mode of teaching, the picturesqueness, the simplicity of it, fascinated these simple hearers; He was one of themselves. He was not, as it were, born in the purple; He spoke

their own language, His discourse was full of their homely ways and of their intimate affairs. He had nothing to say about great earthly claims. He resisted their wish to make Him a King. The first sign of any pomp, or any regal pageantry, was this humble seat upon an ass as He entered the city to die. He spoke to them in a language which was always intelligible to the people, and always is. His was a kingship which men can understand before they have made false kingships for themselves. It was the kingship of truth, the kingship of compassion, the kingship of goodness. The people had understood Him from the first, and the people of Jerusalem understood Him at the last.

Now, it is one of the most hopeful things in human nature, and, indeed, it is the one thing which forbids us to despair of our race, that though as individuals we are often selfish and sordid, and commonplace and earthly enough, when we are massed together in society, and especially in nations, we become idealists; the earth falls away from us, and the spirit appears. We become susceptible to ideal appeals, we permit our hearts to be moved by noble com-

passion, we lift up our eyes readily to the "high white star of Truth," and goodness becomes attractive to us. Men in detail are very trivial and paltry, but the corporate humanity is noble. The individual of a nation—the average Englishman, for example—is often a poor creature, but this great England is a being that always borders on nobility, and sometimes enters it. We as individuals are nothing, but men in aggregates are great. There is no falser thought that ever enters a human heart than that base notion of a declining civilisation—the tendency to speak of men as "the masses" or "the mob." Much nearer the truth is the old saying, *Vox populi est vox Dei*—the voice of a nation is often the sound of God in it, and the will of God expressed by it.

You need not, therefore, be astonished, wonderful and beautiful as it is, at this attitude of Jerusalem, this readiness of the people to accept Jesus Christ. They liked what they had heard of Him, His reputation was very pleasant in their ears, they were captivated by His lowliness, His unpretentiousness—so unlike the people they had seen in authority before, the sort of men who sat in the Temple and thanked

God they were not as other men; here was their Lord, thanking God that He was as other men, a man, always calling Himself *the Son of Man*! They were fascinated with Him, and when on the following day coming back into the city—this time quite simply, it being not necessary again to make the symbolic entry, as the ruler that was to come to the city—He entered the Temple, and in the most practical and simple way began to cleanse it, turning the den of robbers that it had become into the House of Prayer that it was meant to be, a wave of religious enthusiasm and passionate approbation passed over the people. Jerusalem was stirred, and it became quite plain to the rulers of the people, the heads of the Jewish Church, that unless they could make away with Him, unless they could discredit and destroy Him, all the hearts of the people would go after Him, for He was just such an one as they needed.

II. Now that brings us to look for a moment at the attitude of these chief priests and scribes and rulers. And I know not which is more noticeable, *their* unanimous resolve to oppose and to destroy Him, the rightful sovereign of

the nation, or *His* clear-sighted recognition of their purpose, and unresisting submission to their decision. Certainly that first point is very striking—these good worthy men, sitting in Moses' seat, were the mainstay of the religious system which in all its details was a prophecy of Jesus Christ. Some of them were the trained and professional interpreters of the ancient writings, which could literally be said one and all to speak of Him. Others of them were the leaders of that administrative system which we sum up in the term "synagogue"—the gatherings of worshippers which were to be the model, the pattern, on which Jesus Christ Himself was about to found His own Societies or Churches. The priests, the sacrifices, the elders, were the authorised representatives of a system of religion, which from first to last in all its details and in all its history was designed to be the preparation for the coming of Jesus and the interpretation of Him when He came. And they would be, therefore, you might suppose, the readiest way of preparing those who believed in that religion to receive Him.

We stand absolutely dumbfounded before

these men. I have no explanation of their conduct, no one has ever given any explanation of it. We can only say that whether it was pride or prejudice, or that kind of moral insensibility which is very often found side by side with the strictest religious orthodoxy, whatever it was, something prevented them from recognising Jesus as the Christ. What the people had seen at a glance, they could not see even with careful inquiry. What the people seemed to feel by an instinct, these men seemed by another instinct to reject unanimously. The noble zeal which led Him to cleanse the Temple, and win the admiration and astonishment of the people, appeared to these leaders of the people simply a breach of order, simply a fanatical usurpation, an occasion for censure and condemnation.

It seems, sometimes, as if it is the fault of all hierarchies that they cease to judge by spiritual or moral considerations, and come to try everything by the interests of their own order. Beyond that explanation there seems to be none. And accordingly, though in the presence of the people they were cautious, and were so afraid to cross the popular convictions

that they dared not even deny that John the Baptist came from heaven, they made up their minds by all means to get rid of the born leader of their race, and the Divine Saviour of mankind.

It is full of significance, and it breaks upon us with a horror of discovery, that there are multitudes of religious people who would do just the same in the same circumstances.

But the other thing which startles us is that the Lord never for a moment appealed from the rulers to the people. It never occurred to Him to question the validity of their decision. He accepted them at once as the spiritual authorities of His nation, and on the strength of their decision, though the people were in His favour, He pronounced a verdict on the nation. This verdict is contained in the image of a barren fig tree, which puts out the presumptuous promise of fruit when it has nothing but leaves. He declares that the time of fruit is past, that this nation, with its rulers, is for ever set aside; "henceforth no man shall gather fruit of it for ever." Then He proceeds in direct and simple language to explain to His disciples if only they could understand, by what methods the vast

encumbrance of this obsolete Judaism, which may well be described as a mountain, may be rolled out of the way and a straight path made for the King to approach His own. The method is a beautifully simple one; it is the power of believing prayer, resting upon the unconditional forgiveness of all our personal foes. Let that prayer be at work and Jerusalem shall be destroyed, its Temple shall be ruined; the whole obstinate race shall be set aside, and the times of the Gentiles shall come, while the Christ, rejected by the chosen people, shall be welcomed as the Saviour of the world.

What a strange new method of warfare this is! Here is a weapon inconceivable to Judaism, and still inconceivable to many Christians—the weapon of prayer, which rests upon the absolute freedom from personal resentment against any human being. When zeal for religion is intertwined with personal animosity, when our advocacy for truth is a cloak for the hatred of men who do not agree with us, we can accomplish nothing for God; our prayers fall idly from the brazen skies, and our efforts to benefit the world, or to save it, must for ever be in vain. To forgive, to forgive absolutely; to look into

the eyes of the enemies of God and say, while you contend against them, "I love you with all my heart"; to strive in prayer for truth and God, always loving the very men who are prepared to discredit us, to destroy us—that is the only way of securing the great City that is to be built upon the earth, it is the only way of levelling the mountain and casting it into the sea. Have faith in God and forgive your brother—such faith in God that you can forgive your brother; such forgiveness of men that you can have faith in God—and then all things are possible. Prayer of that kind must prevail; the mountain shall be levelled to the plain; and if we question whether we can live such a life and wield such a weapon, every page of the Gospel reminds us :

"It is the way the Master went,
Shall not the servant tread it still?"

XIV.

THE CARTOON OF THE VINEYARD.

(MARK XII.)

THE CARTOON OF THE VINEYARD.

WE saw in the last chapter that Jesus had no intention of resisting the spiritual rulers of His race. Indeed, He had come up to Jerusalem of His own accord on purpose to put Himself into their hands, that they might do with Him whatsoever they listed. The priests of the priestly nation were to offer up their best victim upon the immemorial altar, before it and its rites were swept away for ever. He did not, therefore, attempt to rouse a popular interest in His cause, and so to set the masses against the rulers. He had no wish whatever to frustrate the purpose which they had formed. Still, it was His design, and truth itself required it, to make perfectly plain to these men what they were, and what they were doing. He could not, without being untrue Himself, let them pass scatheless. Accordingly, when they rolled upon Him wave after wave of controversy, He ruthlessly exposed their fallacious thought, and

wave after wave was hurled back, broken, as it were, by His impenetrable wisdom. In clear and trenchant language he then warned the people against the rulers and their practices. But above all, in a parable which they could never forget and which they could not misunderstand, He set out their whole course, national and ecclesiastical, before their eyes. And in showing them what they were about to do and how they stood in relation to God, He declared in unequivocal terms who *He* was, and how *He* stood in relation to God.

There is an exquisite delicacy in this parabolic mode of announcing His message and His mission; but that will not prevent us from seizing the announcement itself and observing how absolutely indisputable it really is. We will first look at the ground of His deep disagreement with the rulers of His people and His solemn warning against them, and then we may pass on to examine closely the picture in which He described their fate and His.

1. In these vv., 38—40, He touches upon two of the most constant tendencies of the ministerial or clerical mind—self-assertion, and avarice veiled by religiosity. It can be no

question to anyone who knows the history of the Church that these two vices have alienated the people from Jesus Christ century after century. It might, therefore, be well for the people to understand that Christ denounced them more bitterly than the people have resented them. It would seem that these men, like us all, were inclined to stand upon the dignity of their order and to claim the full rights of their position. And if it is not too bold to paraphrase the charges against them, so that their applicability to us in the present day may be clear, we may say that they desired to wear a distinctive dress, to show that they were separate from the rest of the community, they desired to receive a distinctive title of reverence when they moved among their fellow-citizens in the market-place; they demanded places of pre-eminence in the Church when they were worshipping on the equality of human nature before its God, and they sought for a social precedence, too, even in private life. As the Lord puts it, "which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the market-place, and the chief seats in the synagogues and the uppermost rooms at the feasts."

But this was not all. The constant round of public prayers which men frequently confuse with religion—though it may easily be the very death of religion—in their case covered a grasping and cruel rapacity. Whoever suffered they would have their dues. Though it should be the poorest and most helpless of widows' houses that was devoured, their property should be secured: "which devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayers." It is not desirable for us to confine the words of our Lord to the Scribes at Jerusalem, because the Scribes have never ceased, and His words are always applicable. I say it to you, but much more solemnly I say it to myself, as one called on to preach the Gospel of Christ, "Ye shall receive greater damnation, ye who stand in the high place of the synagogue, and lead the worship of the people, if ye are not righteous and just and true; your condemnation shall be greater than any."

2. But we may now pass to look at the picture in which Jesus delineates the chosen people, the Jewish Church; sketching its history, its relation to God and to Himself. Let us get into the situation. There is an owner of

a vineyard who has carefully tilled it, and provided all the appliances that are necessary. But having to be away, he puts it into the charge of some cultivators on what are evidently meant to be terms of mutual advantage. When the harvest comes he sends a slave to receive the produce of the year. But the men have formed a felonious design; they take the slave and beat him, and send him back without any of the produce, to indicate that they regard it as their own. The owner sends another slave, but the felonious purpose has grown more fixed, and the hearts of the men are hardened; they not only beat him and send him away empty, but they wound him and put him to shame. The owner sends a third, who finds that the progress in crime has already ripened rapacity into murder, and he perishes at their hands. And now it appears that strong measures must be taken if the property is to be saved. The owner seems to say, "It is possible, of course, that these men do not acknowledge slaves, but treat them as their fellow-servants, and will not listen to their demands. I will try them by sending the owner himself, my well-beloved son, who is indeed dear to me as myself; and when they see

him, knowing that he is the owner, they will return to their duty, they will yield the vintage to him, and the outrages upon the slaves shall be forgiven." But so rapid had been the descent in crime that when they saw the son, and knew that it was the son, they determined to carry out a desperate purpose—they would kill him and steal the vineyard. They kill him and cast him out.

And the inheritance is theirs? Yes; but that the owner is the owner still, and that he has all power behind his right; but that it has always been decreed that the stone which the builders rejected should come to be the headstone of the corner. Their crime is successful? Yes; but that just as it succeeds the arrows of vengeance are hurtling in the air. Nothing could be more distinct than that. And our first thought is the fatuity and the folly of the men, who had heard it and understood it, proceeding to carry out their murderous, their suicidal purpose, restrained for a moment only, not by the truth, but by the fear of the masses, who counted this to be the Messiah.

Our thought turns to the men who came before, the long line of messengers of God who

had been sent to claim the possession and had been ill-used, and in many cases slain, for their faithfulness to their Master. But all this is secondary. Presently our whole attention is fixed upon the one central truth which makes the Parable of the Vineyard the greatest revelation in this Gospel. Jesus Christ is perfectly clear, and states it so that no one can mistake, that HE IS THE SON OF GOD. He knows that He has come to die at the hands of the people who preside over the destinies of His race. He sees His triumph beyond His death. Rejected, persecuted, and slain, He sees Himself in their hands. He knows them well, but He knows His Father better still. He never doubts the issue, and here, just on the verge of it all, He explains to them exactly how the matter stands. The greatest prophets who had come before—Moses, and Elijah, and Isaiah, and Daniel—they were all like slaves compared with Him, for He was the Son Himself. The history of the Chosen People since the call of Abraham had all been a trial and a test, an appeal to the nation to see if it would serve the nation's God. But now that the Son had come, the doom of the people must be determined in one way or

another. There can be no further vacillation ; the way in which they receive Him must settle their national existence. How could it be otherwise, when the supreme revelation of God has come, when, as it were, the Godhead has pressed into a human form that He might show Himself to the human race? Supposing, then, He is met with murderous insolence, with daring robbery, with rebellion sealed in blood, there can be but one issue. From such premises there is but one conclusion: What will He do to these husbandmen? They could answer it themselves, any one could answer it; it was a foregone conclusion.

We must pause for a moment before this tremendous assertion of Jesus, and I want to ask you to face it and to make up your mind what you think of it. Here we have the earliest and the simplest of the records of the life of Jesus, and in it Jesus unequivocally declares that He is the Son of God, out of all comparison with the very greatest that had gone before, though it were Moses or Abraham himself. The dogma, as we call it, of His Divinity is, after all, simply the expression of His self-consciousness. It comes before us as a fact

which must be faced, and it seems to be to-day the most pressing of all strictly theological questions. How common it is to hear from troubled, and sometimes from untroubled, souls this kind of saying, "Of course I believe that Jesus was a good man, the best man that ever lived; but I cannot accept His Divinity." Sometimes that doubt is uttered with a suppressed cry of the heart, as if the doubter were saying, "What reason have you to believe that He was anything more than a man? I do not believe it; I am sure He was not. But oh! if you could but prove that He was!" But more frequently this doubt comes with a sense of final superiority which seems to imply that if we do believe in Him we are not only deluded but almost imbecile. Now, if that is the principal doubt of to-day we should face it with all our might. We must avoid that pitiless kind of dogmatism which bruises, without convincing, the sceptical mind. The mystical argument from personal experience is ineffectual for those who do not know. It seems to them not only a pitiful hallucination but also a further condemnation, since they are strangers to it. There is but one plain answer to this doubt,

and it is before us now. We take this earliest testimony to the historic Jesus, the Gospel of St. Mark. The picture drawn here is so inimitable that we are driven to the conclusion of its veracity by this one question, "Who could have invented it?" When the picture is before us as we have been trying to depict it in these pages, distinctly and authoritatively before us, so that we see it and hear it with the eyes and the ears of the Spirit; when this picture is distinctly before us, there is something in its perfect harmony, in its beauty, in its power, that seems to bend us down before Him and to elicit a suppressed cry of worship long before we have determined who He is; and then from the lips of One so distinct historically, so lovely and authoritative spiritually and morally, there comes a statement, delicate and exquisite like the subtle and stealing truths of Nature, self-evidencing and conclusive—that He is the One, the Beloved Son of God.

It therefore seems necessary to come to a conclusion. The issue is quite clear. I do not want to say there are not two alternatives; there obviously are, and it is possible for you to take either, and to take either

with a great deal of veracity, though with incalculable spiritual results in one direction or the other. The issue is perfectly clear—it is one thing or the other. Either we must dismiss this record; we must say about this Gospel of Mark, “It is simply a lovely creation of the fancy; we rank it with the poems of all ages. We know not how it came, but we put it on the shelf with our poets and our dreamers, and we walk for the rest with our hearts closed against a beautiful fancy, preferring the hard substance of fact though it bruise our feet and torture our heart.” That is one possible conclusion; and this is the other: The Person here must be taken as He is. You cannot call Him a good man but not God; you cannot say He is the best of the race; you must admit that He is above the race.

It is well to realise whither that first alternative is leading those who have adopted it. Take, for instance, that great scholar and brilliant writer, Ernest Renan. He began by showing that the historical Jesus was a sweet dream, idealised in the simple imagination of His rustic followers, and especially in the fervid devotion of

His female attendants. In the charm of the book, the *Vie de Jésus*, one might not at once perceive the logical issue to which it led. One was inclined to say, "This brilliant writer will remain in the train of Jesus; he will worship though he may not fully believe what we believe." Do not permit to yourselves these delusions. We now have before us the concluding word of Renan's teaching. This is what he says: "The future definitively will no longer believe in the supernatural, for the supernatural is not true. Be tranquil; Judaism and Christianity will disappear. The Jewish work will end, but the Greek work—that is, science rational and experimental, civilisation without charlatanism, without revelation, founded on reason and liberty—will, on the contrary, go on for ever." That is logical, if Renan's picture of Jesus is the true picture. Of course Christianity will disappear. We shall not be left with a dream, an illusion, a fancy, to feed the spirit of man on. This is the result of trying to deal with the life of Jesus from the *à priori* dogma that the supernatural is impossible. It may well make us pause. For how arbitrary, how unproved is

this assumption that the supernatural will disappear because it is untrue! It is nearer the truth to say that the natural is unreal and will disappear. For every attempt to explain the Natural,—whether matter or force, law or life, not a human being only, but even an indivisible atom—pushes us rapidly into the region of the Supernatural, and reminds us that God is necessary for the understanding of even “the parts of His ways.”

But if we cannot discredit the history of Jesus by the dogma that the supernatural is impossible, we are brought face to face with the other alternative. Here is the Person, whose picture could hardly have been invented, whose words authenticate themselves by the vast improbability of any Jewish writers conceiving them or attributing them to one whom they desired to honour. He claims to be the unique Son of God. He will be murdered by His people, and their punishment will be the decline and ruin in which they remain to-day. He is there with His distinct claim; He presses Himself upon us in no debatable way: “I am the Son of God. I am the Way, the Truth, the Life.” And if He is there, if He is what He

says He is, it is obvious to us all that we shall not understand Him until we bow to Him, we shall not see what He means until our heart is surrendered to Him. We cannot stand before Him like an earthly king, with the conventional bending of the knee in a decorous homage as if He could not read the heart. The only attitude which we can assume before Him is that of the inward and secret surrender of all our heart and mind and soul to Him: We must be bowed at His feet to learn and to obey.

Practically, essentially, we are all bound in this matter to occupy either the position of the disciples or else the position of those spiritual leaders of the nation. We either eject the Son from His own, or welcome Him to it; we either reject the stone or we bring it out to be the head of the corner with rejoicing. Thank God, it is no business of ours to judge any man; but it is our own business to judge ourselves. We stand before our own judgment-seat, and the logic of the situation demands that we be quite honest with ourselves, and act upon our conviction. The question is: "Shall I take the Heir, and with the delicate irony and the polished sentimentalism of the modern scholar,

kill Him and cast Him out of His vineyard ; or shall I, with the disciples, hail Him as my Lord, as my Saviour, as my God ; bow to Him heart and spirit, and tell Him, if He is mine, I also would be His for ever, servant and friend ? ” There is the alternative, and may God lead us to see and to know that we cannot rest at a point between the two ; and may He lead us to decide for the alternative of frank acceptance, that, acknowledging Him to be the Son, we may give Him the only place that the Son of God can consistently take !

XV.

THE VISION OF DOOM.

(MARK XII. 41—XIII.)

THE VISION OF DOOM.

THE announcement of the doom which impended over Jerusalem and over the Jewish people is preceded immediately by a charming incident which illustrates how very different the vision and the judgment of Jesus are from those of ordinary people. He was in the precincts of the Temple, watching the long stream of offerers who were putting their money into the horns provided to receive it. But in the stream of people there was one face which arrested His meditative eye, and He must at once summon His disciples to Him that He may disclose to them the beautiful thought which has flashed into His mind. That woman there, He says, that poor, pale woman, she has just made the most bountiful gift of them all, because all the rest have many wants, and when they have satisfied their wants they give of that which is over to their God. That poor woman has no wants at all, except the great want—her God.

And, therefore, without any embarrassment, she has been able to give to Him all that she had, and to leave herself in the happy destitution of a believer.

Now, it was by precisely the same unexpected insight, piercing through the appearances to the very core of reality, that He was able to speak as He did about the noble building under whose shadow He with His disciples was sitting. Every Jewish heart felt about that building very much what is expressed in this exclamation of the disciple. Its magnificence excited a rapture of admiration, its tradition set vibrating the deepest chords of feeling, for it had been for a thousand years—a period as long as from ourselves to Alfred the Great—it had been for a thousand years the centre of a nation's life; ruined, rebuilt, restored, it was always the same Temple, upon the same site; and round it clustered the associations of all those great and poignant experiences. The Jew thought it was the dwelling-place of God, and never questioned that within the darkness of that shrine the Supreme Being held His Court and manifested Himself to the world. Jesus looked at it in quite another light. Entirely undazzled by the

magnificence, quite unimpressed by the ritual and the pageantry that were for ever proceeding within its courts, He looked upon it as the symbol of a petrified religion, the shrine of a decaying faith. He seemed to know—what it must have been hard indeed for any *man* to know then—that sacred buildings are generally not the conservers, but the tombs, of sanctity. And He already saw, and saw with hope and gladness as the prelude of the greater faith, that within a generation these gorgeous decorations would be consumed by fire, and these stately walls would be levelled with the dust.

There is not so much difference between a bat's eyes and an eagle's as there is between the insight, as we call it, of ordinary men, and the insight of Jesus. The whole universe and every detail of it becomes changed to our eyes directly we catch a glimpse of any part from the standpoint of Jesus Christ. How tawdry are the pomps and the magnificences which we admire, and how splendid are the lowly eternities which we despise!

Follow Him through the precincts of the doomed Temple, through the Sheep Gate, across

the River Kedron, to the slope of the Mount of Olives, from which all the pinnacles of the Temple stand in clear view. Sit at His feet while the disciples ask Him about the catastrophe at which He hinted, and listen to His answer !

But here immediately we plunge into a difficulty. Our records in this Gospel, which hitherto have been so lucid and intelligible, suggesting to us pictures drawn upon the spot, here become blurred and confused. While each paragraph of this chapter bears the stamp of His thought and of His utterance, it is quite plain that the paragraphs have been connected, pieced together, by another hand than His. That would be evident even from this one detail, that in two succeeding verses He says of the event which seems to occupy His speech that it is to happen within a generation, and yet that the time of it is unknown to Himself as well as to others. We must remember, of course, that the oral tradition on which the Church depended for the first generation might be perfectly distinct as far as the words went, and yet be confused as to the times of utterance and the connection between piece and piece.

The confusion which occurs here is clearly owing to the recollection of two quite distinct discourses, two quite distinct trains of thought; and the confusion has only this to recommend it to us and to make us thankful for it, that it proves the extreme antiquity of the reminiscences on which it depends. These words must have been strung together in this form before the year 70—the date of the destruction of Jerusalem—because the event which happened then would have sufficed to disentangle the two streams of thought, just as it suffices to-day to disentangle them, as we study them in the history of the past. If the Evangelist had lived after the destruction of Jerusalem the confusion would not have occurred; but if the confusion had not occurred we should have been wanting in this peculiarly valuable evidence of the primitive character of the records. The very confusion, therefore, is a mark of authenticity, and to the careful student suggests that the records of St. Mark are previous to the year 70 A.D.

That, of course, is one point, and an important one, but if we would learn from the chapter what it has to teach, we must make an attempt

to disentangle the two discourses and to follow out the two lines of thought. There were two prophecies. The first of them was one which naturally arose out of the circumstances of that day when Jesus explained that the people of privilege and promise were unworthy husbandmen from whom the vineyard must be taken. It naturally followed upon that parable, that He should describe the ruin of the building which had been the shrine and the centre of the ancient faith. Now, if you take vv. 5, 6, 14—23, 28—31 together, you will have a distinct and connected prophecy upon that particular subject. He points out that the city and the Temple are to perish in a terrible rout of siege and plague and famine, and the national existence of His own people is to cease within forty years—within a generation—of the time at which He was speaking.

We may ask, “Why should He be so particular to explain this coming disaster to His disciples?” We remember that he was a Jew, and they were Jews. He Himself was the Jewish Messiah, the Christ. He had taught His disciples to show the profoundest respect not only to the Temple, but to the Jewish

spiritual authorities. He well understood that in their mind all religion was absolutely bound up with that sacred building and with the perpetuity of its Divine ordinances. He could see what would happen, what a shock would come to their mind and to their faith, if this centre of Divine revelation should be destroyed, and if the Temple of God upon earth should cease to be. His purpose, therefore, was to disengage His own great faith from the ruins of the Temple. He wished to teach His disciples that this Temple and all its institutions could perish without even touching the faith that He had come to preach. He and His religion, they and their witness, must not be confused with the dying institutions of an exhausted creed. They would live and work when the whole Jewish people were scattered as a remnant over the face of the globe, and when the Turk would rule over the land of Jehovah, and a Mohammedan mosque would occupy the place of the Temple itself. It was of supreme importance that these simple men should understand from the beginning that the Founder of their faith did not count upon the continuance of the Temple; He regarded with perfect

equanimity the approaching catastrophe which would sweep it for ever from the earth. There is the one distinct line of thought and prophecy.

But if you take the remaining words of the chapter you will see that another discourse, perhaps given at the same time, certainly within a few days, had been directed to a further and even a more important object. Beyond the ruin of Judaism stretched the history of the coming Church, and it was the purpose of the Founder to speak to His disciples some words of warning, exhortation, and encouragement, which would continue in force to the very end, until the completed Church should pass to the victory which He promised. Now these Apocalyptic sayings which cover the whole period of the history of the Church can be distinguished from the sayings which refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. And how necessary it is to distinguish them. What is the destruction of Jerusalem to you? That great catastrophe of the year 70, which seemed literally to shake the world, has become to you an incredible dream. Unless you take the trouble to read the pages of Josephus, and to realise the horror and torture of the siege,

the words, vv. 14—23, must seem to you an exaggeration. You cannot imagine how any earthly catastrophe could be described in language so terrible. The destruction of Jerusalem lies in a forgotten past. But what He said about the future of His Church refers still to an unknown future, and it is necessary for us even now to weigh and to understand the things which He foretold.

The keynote of this discourse is in verse 10, where He declares that before the end should come, the Gospel He was preaching would be proclaimed to all the nations of the earth. The temerity of that assertion is perfectly fascinating. Go back in the spirit of realism to the situation on the day when He spoke the words, and look at the position as it would strike the eye. There is a little group of peasants who have come with all their country ways from the north of Galilee. Already in the secret conclave of His nation's rulers their Leader has been condemned to death. They are in the shadow of the great Temple of their ancestors, they are the citizens of a State that is great in their eyes, but a State which was very small in the midst of the great nations of

the earth, a State already dying, reaching the very limits of its existence. And with a simple confidence which is indeed sublime He tells them that the broken words He has spoken on the hillsides, the message He has delivered to them, shall circle the globe, and they shall forge the first links of the golden chain. It is sublime, and if it had not been true, ridiculous. It is only when we see it in the light of what has happened, and when we understand to-day how, after all these centuries, the undying purpose is working in the very heart of England, —our great world-spreading Empire, a purpose to carry out the prophecy,—it is only then we realise that its sublimity is based upon truth, and that the forecast was Divine. How hard it was for these first disciples to believe and how easy it is for us! How incredible the words to that little group, how obvious to us who have understood the inward significance of them.

But now what strange means of progress and world-conquest does He mention. The men are to be witnesses, humble peasants as they are, before governors and kings, and they are to be persecuted. That is to be their lot all

along. There will be unhappy divisions cleaving even the household asunder, because one man in the household will hear the call and engage in the enterprise, and the rest will decline it and oppose. And, most mysterious of all, they shall be hated of all men for His sake. Why? we ask. The Son of God, the Saviour dying for the world, with no thought but to heal, and to save, and to bless—when the world sees a man coming in His name, surely it will hail him with gratitude and joy! So it would seem. How well He knew, how wise His foresight, how prudent to tell them all beforehand. It was quite correct; experience has confirmed it. Why does the England of the East, the great island of Japan, to-day rise up and in bitter hatred seek to expel the missionaries from their shores? Why is it that these missionaries have to

Stand alone

While the men they agonise for hurl the contumelious
stone?

Simply because they bear the name of Jesus, and the world hates them for His sake. And not only so, but here in England, where we put His sacred name upon the forefront of our

national life, and profess to serve and follow Him, I never yet knew a man or woman that really believed in Him who did not gather into the heart of him or her a meed of human hate. It has ever been so, and He tells us it ever will be so. We must face it, we must reckon with it, and God grant that we may not be

Unworthy of the grand adversity,

or unwilling to accept the reproach of Christ.

But this is not to dismay either them or us even for a moment. For always like a steadfast star shining through the night rack, or like a voice that is clear and calm above the tumult of the tempest, there is this promise that He gave—no one can take it from us. Beyond the wars and the tumults, beyond the sufferings, the declensions, the treasons, the ruin and the shame, it is always there, the promise of “the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory,” and all His angels speeding from end to end of the world and of the heavens,—because part of the host will be dead and part will be alive, but gathering together all the elect of God—the definition of election being “those that have en-

duced to the end"—no one can take that promise away.

Men would rob the Church of her hope because the hope is deferred. And a still more serious difficulty occurs: men would discredit the promise because the idle and impertinent speculations of Christians, who ought to know better, have always been settling the day and the hour as if we could know when the Advent should be. These try to pluck from us the hope on which we build, but the heart of true faith cannot be disturbed by this, the perversion and the discrediting of the Lord's own words, for He took pains to assure us that we could not know the day and the hour, that He did not know it Himself, so that the standing order of His Church should be to expect His advent, but never to forecast it. "The last day," said St. Augustine, "is concealed that all days may be observed."

And thus we reach the supreme end, the outcome of His forecast and prophecy—that we are to watch. All the accidents of that moment fall away. We are not detained by the thought of Jerusalem, which is about to perish; but rising plain and commanding

enough before our eyes and our hearts is the person of our Lord on this Olivet of faith which is still given to believing feet; we hear Him telling us, what He tells to all, that we are to watch. We know not the day of His coming. We are in His house, a house which reminds us on every side that the absence of the Master must be confessed, and yet reminds us on every side that His mystical presence is felt. We are in His house, expecting His return. We have set our porter at the gate, and told him to keep his eyes fixed on the long line of the glimmering road, and his ears attentive to the first approach of the wheels. We have told our watchers to tell us, and to remind us from day to day, and from week to week, that we are to watch ourselves, lest He come and find us sleeping. It may be the morning, when the business of the day begins, and we are issuing to face the crowd of anxious duties, but we must watch; for it may be He will prevent the first of these pressing cares and be here before the business that we either desire or dread. Or it may be the evening, when the "dewy fingers are drawing the gradual veil" about our head and we sink

into the brief oblivion of sleep; but let our hearts be vigilant and prayerful even while we sleep, for it may be His voice that will wake us before the morning comes. How strange it is that there are those who fall into the death called sleep, oblivious that there is a sleep which knows no waking! It may be at midnight, when the silent land lies in the semblance of death; but let us be careful how we spend our midnights, and where we are at the turning of the day, in what company, in what action, with what cherished thoughts, what passions, what desires, because from the starry spaces may come the murmur of His approach at midnight, and in the stillness we may find He is there. Or it may be when the cock crows and the first streak of dawn is in the sky. That may be the warning that He has come; and He must not find us sleeping, forgetful what we are, and why He put us here—unfaithful stewards, rebellious husbandmen, eating and drinking, and amusing ourselves, when He comes to ask us for some account of our brief probation, and the yielding of the terms on which we lived. What He says unto all He says to you: “Watch!” for you know not at

what hour or on what day your Lord shall come, lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping, and the awakening be such as you can imagine for an unfaithful servant who had forgotten his Lord.

XVI.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

(MARK XIV.)

THE SHADOW OF DEATH.

THE fourteenth chapter can only be treated as a single cartoon if, after the manner of some old Italian painters—you will find several examples of what I refer to in the National Gallery—we may place the several episodes in separate groups upon the canvas, repeating the figures in the different situations. For the chapter is a drama rather than a picture—a tragedy in five acts, with a prelude and two interludes and an epilogue which show us what is proceeding behind the scenes. The great, the beautiful, the pathetic central figure is Jesus Himself, moving with the calm strength of a hero to his doom, and yet quivering with human sensibility in the multiplied sufferings of the occasion. He shrinks, as a delicate woman will shrink from exposure and shame, from coarseness and ruffianism; but He proceeds to the end with undaunted intrepidity, as if He were one invulnerable to pain. Nowhere

in the whole story does He appear so completely, so touchingly, a man. It is the human interest which stirs and shakes us as we trace the events one by one. Yet nowhere does He more explicitly declare, and more manifestly show, that He is more than man. This twofold fact appears at every point of the story. The other persons of the drama are two groups of men rather than individuals—the priests and the disciples—the priests devising their iniquitous plan of murder under judicial forms, the disciples drawn by avarice or by fear into every degree of treachery and desertion, from the betrayal of Judas to the denial of Peter.

This is the plot. In the first verse or two there is the prelude, which gives the key to the whole action. The priests at the Passover mean to kill the Paschal Lamb—they unconscious, Him conscious. Then comes Act I.—the anointing unto the burial in the house at Bethany. Then follows an interlude—the treacherous disciple, gangrened with covetousness, is seen rejoicing the hearts of the priests with the offer to sell his Master to them. Then comes Act II.—the preparation for the Passover, and at the sitting down the tragic

announcement that the traitor is there in the group of disciples. Then Act III.—the Last Supper and the Paschal hymn. Act IV.—Gethsemane, the agony and the arrest. Then another interlude; a young man in a linen cloth who appears and flies, leaving his garment behind, naked. Surely this must be Mark the Evangelist. There is no other reason for the passage. He wishes in this way to hint that he saw what was done that day. It is like the initials of the painter woven dexterously into the subject of the picture. Then Act V.—the judgment, and the verdict of the nation's priests upon the nation's King. And the curtain falls upon the drama with a scene, an epilogue, inexpressibly sad. There in the courtyard is the chief disciple vehemently declaring he never knew his Master, and then, appropriate end for a tragedy, drowned on recollection in conscious tears.

It will not do for us to touch this theme except with the reverent hands of imagination and of love. Ask that you may understand it, and that you may read its eternal lessons. If you are simply bent on looking at it as one picture in a gallery, to gaze and to pass on, I

beg you not to look at it at all. Only if you can give an undivided attention, if you will gaze and meditate and pray, if you will summon all your powers to bring the scene before you just as it happened, and to bring to the scene the sober criticism of one who desires the truth, combined with the passionate love and submission of those who know the truth when they see it—only so come and look at this picture, and let the records pass into your soul.

I omit the prelude and the interludes and the epilogue; they proceed there in the background, the dark workings of malice and treachery, of fear and remorse. We shall not forget them; but we may pass to the five acts and fix our thought on Him who is the centre of them all, and see what is in His mind as well as what happens to His person.

Act I. The first act sets us in the house of Simon at Bethany, and Jesus is there. He is going to die in two days' time. He knows it, He feels it in every fibre of His sensitive frame. Death is always terrible. But sinful bodies are akin to it; He alone could know its real terrors whose sinless body was out of all

necessary touch with death. That we should die is nature, and the shock is softened by the sad congruity of all natural processes. But for Him to die was a strange and outrageous incongruity. It was as if some dark jet of oozing water from an earthly swamp spurted up and quenched the sun. He has no relation to death, He is united with it only by a *tour de force*, and it is this terrific and jarring discord that sobs and quivers through the chapter—that He should die ! And there is this woman at the house. Does this woman know ? Women have strange intuitions, especially in the shadow of death. She takes her alabaster vase and snaps the neck, so that the precious spikenard flows over His head. He says it is done for His burial. She means it as a token of a love that spares nothing. So we always pour our spikenard on our loved ones when they are slipping away from us.

We bless that woman. She relieves, by expressing, our own yearning affection and tearful reverence. When all were betraying and deserting Him, when He was to be left alone, to be mocked and mauled and murdered, this dear creature silently and tenderly poured the

consecrating gratitude of humanity over the Saviour of Men. God bless her! She shall be remembered for all time. And He was grateful. With a sweet humility which breaks our hearts, He claimed, against the grudging niggardliness of some spectators who thought it waste, that He might have the attention just for this once which we purse-proud human beings affect to give, rather than give, to the poor.

Act II. The second act takes us into Jerusalem again. It is the day on which the Paschal Lamb will be slain at nightfall, and Jesus is walking in a shadow, for He knows that He is the Lamb for this year, and for all years to come. He makes that evident in all He says and does in these two acts. But there is a kind of mystery which attends the proceedings of that day. "Go up to the city," He said to two of them, "go into the street and you will see there a strange spectacle, a man—not a woman—carrying a pitcher of water upon his head. Go into the house where he enters, and there you will find *My* guest-chamber. You did not know I had a room in Jerusalem? Yes, but I have. It is all,

as it were, pre-arranged—nothing is happening by chance to-day. It is My guest-chamber. To-night for the first time it will be opened, and it will never be shut again, nor will the guests cease to arrive until we have the great upper chamber ready, and we gather them in from the north and the south, and the east and the west.” They do what He tells them and make ready for the evening. Now the evening comes, and they all enter the city again. They find the house, and mount to the upper room, and stretch themselves upon the couches round about the table. And the first course of that memorable feast is served. It is that course of bitter herbs, the word from His lips, “One of you sitting here with Me, one of you will betray Me.” Is it you, is it I? I know what is coming from His lips. It is just, it is necessary. If I betray Him it were indeed better, far better, that I had never been born, or had perished as an untimely fruit of the womb. Is it you? Is it I? “One of you will betray Me.”

Act III. And we pass to the third act. The scene remains the same, but it is all mysteriously and wonderfully changed. No words can

describe the touching solemnity of that which is now to take place. They are all agitated with that searching question, "Is it I that shall betray Him?" And He, too, is thinking of the death which approaches, though He looks far beyond it to another feast of a different kind in the Kingdom of God. But this is the last meal He will ever eat with them on earth. He is to part from them, the men who have companied with Him for these few months. You can see what is in His mind—will they forget Him, these who to-night will forsake Him and flee? This protesting disciple who early to-morrow morning will thrice declare that he does not know Him? Will they forget Him altogether? Or if they remember Him, will they understand what He is doing for them? Perhaps they will only remember that He was a kind teacher, a benevolent healer, a brave leader, who tragically perished. Perhaps they will come to think that His death, deliberately faced, was only an accident in His life. Perhaps they will miss the connection between it and their salvation, their re-birth, their forgiveness. All this passes through His thoughts. He will, therefore, make a

covenant with them at this table, a covenant which they will never be able to forget, which will last just as long as the world lasts, a covenant which, remembered, will never cease to tell them the meaning of what He is doing. He will turn the supper into a new testament for them. So He takes the bread and breaks it; that is His body. He takes the wine and pours it out; that is His blood. "You shall take and eat and drink, and you will never forget. I die to-morrow. You will remember why I died, and how My dying shall be your meat and your drink unto life everlasting, until I drink the new wine in the Kingdom of God, with you ransomed, at My table." Well might they now sing together the Great Hallel. This is the new Passover celebrated once, but now to be celebrated for ever—the Master is dying for His disciples.

Act IV.—The fourth act takes us over the Kedron again to the slope of Olivet. Now, I ask you, do you see Him in Gethsemane, or are your eyes heavy, too? And do you sleep as they slept? Oh, watch and pray! The spirit is willing enough to understand what happened in the garden, but the flesh is weak. Is there

any one who tracks Him in the garden to betray Him with a kiss? The foes of Jesus would never find Him, perhaps would never seek Him, but for the traitor in His own circle. Every betrayal comes from one who has known Him, and known Him intimately. I could have wished at times that the three had been able to share that brief vigil with Him; that they could have supported just for one hour that sacred companionship. And yet in my own guilty failures, my own want of vigilance, my own weariness in prayer, I gain a faint consolation from their apathy, though I feel a fresh self-condemnation in my own indignant censure of them. "You could not watch with Him an hour," I say to them, reproachfully, and they to me, "Nor you, either." But look at Him. He is calm in manner, but in His eyes there is a dazed horror of suffering. His soul seems bowed down; it is pushed to the very brink of the River of Death. It is

That utter grief which sees no further pass,
But from the verge looks on vacuity.

Now we shall know what is meant by calling Him a man, and insisting on His humanity; for He is pleading in a passion, in

an agony of prayer, that this may pass away, that He may be spared this intolerable hour. He cannot drink the cup; it is a cup that no man can drink; it is an unspeakable cup. But now we shall understand why we never cease to say, "Though He is Man, He is God." He is Divine indeed, for in that mortal agony of shrinking humanity the whole Spirit rises up in Him, and He says, "Not My will, but Thine be done."

Act V.—The final scene is before the judges of His people. It shakes one with a nameless terror. It is no common miscarriage of justice this; it is not a deed done once and for ever. There we mistake and forget. That court sits still. Living men are on that bench. All is done just as it was done. I could name those men on the judgment-seat; they are familiar to me. I could point out those who spit upon Him, who, throwing a veil over Him, buffet Him and cry scornfully, "Prophecy!" It is terrible, when you think Who He is, to see what men are saying and doing! What is their charge against Him? They have got a garbled version of a great word He once uttered. He said He would rise again, and

they will have none of it; He shall not rise again—they will put Him in a tomb and set a seal upon it; He shall not rise, He shall not break our natural law, for we are men of science. And they have twisted it into a charge against Him; they have read it as a threat against their antiquated pieties, their confident atheisms, their petty and purblind sciences. It is the one thing they will not have of Him—that He should be supernatural, and that the God who made them should press through their human flesh to meet them and to save them. And so they will sit in judgment on Him, and with all the forms of justice they will ask Him candidly, “Now tell us—we are wishful to be quite fair—tell us, are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” And He, with perfect simplicity, says, “I am.” In a necessary truthfulness He tells them, He warns them, that He will come in the clouds of heaven and judge them who judge Him. He must tell them. He could not help being the Son of God. He could not forego His mighty and triumphant reign because of these malicious denials and obstinate assaults. He is bound to tell them, and He does. “Ar

Thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" "I am, and ye shall see me coming in the clouds of heaven." And they turn on Him, and say, "You lie! you lie!" They condemn Him as worthy of death, and the verdict reverberates along the roof of the world's judgment hall. It has come from human lips ever since. Always the same from the kinglets and the princelings, the scientists and the sophists of earth. They say He lies because He tells them the truth, and avows what He came to tell them—that He is the Son of God, Who died for their sins, and will rise again because of their justification. They condemn Him.

Now, we have seen what He is; we have traced Him hitherto in these simple records of His life. Have you found a word unworthy on His lips? Have you found a deed un-Godlike at His hands? He has marched before you in all the manifest Divinity of His profound, self-humbled meekness, in your flesh, amongst you, that He may teach you. And you have been permitted to look into His eyes; you know a little of what He is from word and deed. And these men think He is worthy of death; they pass

sentence upon Him that He shall die as a felon. Oh, God grant that you and I may not be found sitting in the seat of the scornful, and taking part in the condemnation of the Son of God !

XVII.

THE CARTOON OF THE CRUCIFIXION.

(MARK XV.)

THE CARTOON OF THE CRUCIFIXION.

WHEN you are reading the story of an ordinary human life, supposing you have entered sympathetically into it, and have realised at all the character and the aims of the person described, it will go hard with you if the closing scene, however curtly it is presented, does not stir you with some emotion. For there is an undying pathos in death. To look at the motionless form, the aggressive stillness of the pose, and to reflect, "This morning he was alive like me," will bring a sharp pain through the heart and fetch into sight that shape of awe which always lurks behind the arras of life. And supposing the person of whom you have been reading is in any way great or beneficent, has achieved something, or at least has striven to achieve; if he has borne and dared before he died, the death, especially if it be sudden, will affect you with an indescribable perturbation. There are people, I know, who

disdain to be moved, but they are in no natural condition, they have taken narcotics at the hand of pride, or selfishness, or lust. Most of us need have no such disdain.

To approach the death of Jesus, if you have sympathetically studied His life, is more affecting than any other experience of the kind, just in proportion as His life is more beautiful and His death is more outrageous, more cruel, the darkest blot upon that humanity which is stained with so many deeds of guilt.

If we were to gather to a head all the elements of suffering in that event which veiled the heavens in gloom, we should be detained from studying the event itself. But there is one consideration seldom noticed, and very unfamiliar to most of us, which, if it stood quite alone, might suffice to enlist our tenderest sympathies with the sufferer. It is usually only the least of pains—the physical—which the imagination avails to depict. There is no pain merely physical so keen as this—to be conscious in your self of great powers, to be impelled by the noblest motives, to burn with a great message for the world, and yet to find in life no scope, no recognition, no opportunity.

What Milton suffered when he had rolled out the majestic music of *Paradise Lost* to the deaf ears of the England of the Restoration, what Sir John Eliot suffered when his patriotic protest was quenched in the dismal and interminable solitude of the Tower, only high-strung natures can adequately conceive. Posterity discounts these pains because Eliot and Milton are among the immortals. Yes! but they reached their immortality through their pains. And in the same way, when we are studying the death of our Lord, we are so occupied with the joy that was set before Him, and we are so impressed by experience with His soaring and victorious power, that we see the cross through the nimbus of the resurrection, and seldom attain even a glimpse of its actuality to Him. We speak about it theologically or conventionally; we cast over it the golden glamour of Perugino, or we relieve the spiritual tension by the magnificent naturalism of Michael Angelo.

Let us look at it with unflinching realism; leave aside for a moment what it meant, and think only of what it was. Do not bring a tacit theory of His miraculous power,

of His superhuman nature, of His Divine origin, to depreciate and lessen the horror. It is evidently the purpose of this Evangelist that you should look straight at the drear and ghastly fact. We must not even use the word Cross—That is glorified; it is the symbol of the world's civilisation, it is the recognised interpretation of noble human life. You must not call it a cross; you read into it then a thousand things you have learned since. Approaching it through history we carry the glory of the fruitage into the dark and tortuous root. You must approach it from the further side, from the side on which Jesus Himself approached it. And how does it look then? It is a sordid, shameful gallows, such as is reserved for the very vilest of criminals. The sentence is executed by an alien and usurping Government, through the hands of brutal soldiers. But that is not the sting of it. The sting of it is that the sentence was extorted from this alien Government unwillingly by the malicious outcry of His friends, His nation, His countrymen. The sufferer dies there deserted. He has seen a murderer chosen by preference at the election

of His own people. The work He had tried to do seems scattered to the winds. He had chosen a few men to be with Him, but they have all deserted Him. Even the women—the brave hearts of women—only watch Him afar off. But that is not the worst. His people taunt and deride Him, and there are no barbs so poisoned as the barbs of scorn. There is, as far as we can see, no grain of alleviation on the human side, and if there should be added the sense of God Himself having forsaken Him, no alleviation on the Divine side, no relief, no possible relief—the sense of suppression, of failure, of rejection, aggravated by every conceivable suffering—physical, mental, and spiritual. The story is told quite artlessly; there is no attempt to exaggerate, or even to paint the details, but it appeals to us in its simplicity. “Was there ever sorrow like unto His sorrow?”

There are three scenes.

1. We will suppose we are among the crowd that throngs the Pretorium, and peers in at the gate, trying to catch the fragmentary reports of what goes on in the court, or to obtain a glimpse of what is done by the soldiery.

The word passes among the people that the Prisoner is being cross-questioned by the magistrate. The charges against Him are discussed, as one after another is reported, by tongues of doubtful sympathy. There is a momentary impression made by the report that He has in so many words declared Himself to be the King of the Jews. But when it is understood that He has no answer to make to the several points of the indictment, more than one of the thoughtless multitude conclude that silence is a confession of guilt. Presently Pilate comes out to the front of the Hall, and a murmur runs through the throng that he is asking, according to his custom, which of his prisoners should be released. The men of the priests' party are busy in suggestion. "Ask for Barabbas," they say, "our true national hero, who led a revolt against the alien government and even killed one of the legionaries." And, led as a crowd will be by the mere impact of a resolute purpose, where all purposes are vague, they raise the fierce cry, which swells gradually into unanimity, "Release Barabbas, and gibbet Jesus."

Then eager eyes strain to see the rough

horseplay which goes on in the guard-room, where the soldiers in mockery are dressing their victim in the counterfeit insignia of a king. A coarse laugh breaks from the fortunate few who can see all that goes on, as the careless soldiers pay Him a pretended homage, as one in the act of bowing fetches Him a smart blow with his soldier's cane, and another, approaching as if to kiss, spits into His face. Meanwhile the bitter zealots of Judaism convince themselves that this is the due meed of an impostor. "Messiah, indeed, a fellow who never carried a sword in His life, and who told us to love our enemies! How does He love the soldiers yonder, I wonder?"

2. But let us get away for a moment from this rabble of the street, and let us stand with these trembling women who have taken up their post at a point where they can command the Gate and also the Hill of the Skull, for that is where the execution will take place, and they can see all the distance between.

They watch eagerly as the rabble pours through the Gate, and mark with trembling indignation each development of the drama. They are thankful when a passer-by is forcibly

enlisted to carry the Cross, and mark the man for grateful recognition by-and-by. Their eyes follow the slow ascent of the little, skull-shaped hill, the preparations for execution, the stripping of the prisoners, the proffer of a stupefying draught, which by their Lord is refused. Above the tumult and the surging of the crowd comes the sharp ring of the hammer as the nails are driven in. They venture a little nearer, where they can see the inscription over the Cross—to them so true, to those who placed it there so contemptuous—the King of the Jews. They are within earshot of the scornful words addressed to Him by the circle of His persecutors, and every word pierces their hearts like a sword. But as they would withdraw to their coign of vantage, they are prevented by the sudden fall of night. It is the hour of noon, but for three hours darkness reigns supreme. A terrible stillness invades the frightened crowd; and a voice rises distinct out of the horrid gloom. One of these women knows it at once. “It is my Son’s voice; He is speaking in the old familiar language we used to speak at Nazara, long ago.” What are the words which thus, on the lips of death,

revert to the days of boyhood? They are "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Few present understood the words. His mother did; yet even she does not draw more surely the inference from the whole scene than the Centurion who had commanded the soldiers at the execution. It came upon him with an irresistible conviction—a conviction the full grounds of which are implied rather than stated—that this was the Son of God.

3. The long hours have passed and it is six o'clock, and the news has reached the governor in the Pretorium that the criminal is dead. And a councillor of the Sanhedrim comes to the door with a strange request: May he bury this criminal? He wants permission, for a strange impression has come over him that a great mistake has been made. Criminals do not behave like that at the bar, nor do they die like that on the gibbet. And he would like to bury Him. It is a poor and inadequate reparation. The corpse of one we have wronged is a cold recipient of our penitence and tears. But there is some discharge of conscience even in this: May we bury Him? The permission is granted. And he has come

to the cross, and taken down the body. What ■ majestic form it is! He died with that awful cry upon His lips, but He does not look now as if God had forsaken Him. Far otherwise! It is a look of victory upon the dead face, and we will put Him now into this rocky grave—it is the primeval undefiled rock—and we will roll the stone before the entrance.

And who are those two shadows gliding through the dusk and leaning forward with a kind of peering intensity, as if they wished to see through the gloom the solitary deed of reverence and love? They are the two Marys. They wish to know precisely where He was put, and the day after to-morrow, when they have rested for the Sabbath, they will bring the things to embalm and anoint His body. He has gone, but His body is still with them, and they will do reverence to it.

XVIII.

THE RESURRECTION.

(MARK XVI.)

THE RESURRECTION.

You will notice in the Revised Version that there is a little gap between verse 8 and verse 9 of this closing chapter, and you will see in the margin at verse 9 that these concluding verses are not found in two of the oldest manuscripts, and that in some manuscripts a different ending is attached to this Gospel. But even apart from this statement of the R.V., any careful reader would easily observe that these closing words are not an integral part of St. Mark's Gospel. The mere way in which Mary Magdalene is mentioned in verse 9 shows that it is a different source. St. Mark's Gospel breaks off abruptly at the end of verse 8, and all this appendix, vv. 9—20, was added afterwards—added very early, we cannot say by whom. It is a *résumé* of the things which are told us in the other Gospels, and if we had no other Gospel we should be devoutly thankful even for this

fragment. As it is, we will not divert our attention from the closing verses of the true Mark in order to study that *résumé*.

St. Mark's way of ending his narrative is characteristic and very striking. It is evidently his purpose to present in graphic simplicity the amazement of the Resurrection. He states the fact not directly, but by showing the impression produced upon the first observers of it. And then he leaves us with some of the fresh wonder and, let us add, some of the awe and fear, resting for ever on our hearts in recognition of the greatest event that has ever happened upon earth.

There are, of course, amongst us a great number of persons who frankly tell us they do not believe the event ever did happen, and in our day they proceed to say that they would not believe it on any evidence whatever, not even on the evidence of their own senses, for if they had seen it they would have concluded that they were under some hallucination or other. With people in that frame of mind we cannot stop to argue; but if the event happened, and if it was to be recorded in any historical form, we may well ask whether it would be possible to

have a record more simple, more artless, more self-evidential than the little story which is contained in the first eight verses of this chapter. I suppose the consummate art of Daniel Defoe might produce the same effect of reality in fiction, but of such art there can be no question in the present instance; and if any narrative ever could upon its face carry its own authenticity, we may venture to affirm that such a narrative is here. You could not read these verses quietly without the conviction that the writer is perfectly sincere in telling you what, according to the best of his belief, actually happened, and you cannot reflect on what he tells you without a growing conviction that what he states is so coherent, so natural, so taken from the life, that if you are to avoid the conviction of its truth, really the best way is to side with those extreme sceptics and take the strong ground: "The thing did not happen because it could not have happened; I will not believe it on any evidence, for it is *à priori* incredible." How curious it is that men should be so rapid in foreclosing this momentous question and thrusting from them the greatest fact in the world because from its very nature

it is an exceptional fact ! How curious that men should be so anxious to hug the rags of their mortality and refuse the garment of immortal life, to keep down among the mists of the valley when the very voice of God is summoning them to the mountain-top !

But we shall better estimate the value of the plain appeal to our own sense of truth and reality if we dwell for a few moments on the scene which is presented to us. It is, of course, an exceptional and a surprising scene, and when we come to deal with such a scene it is best to get it distinctly before us, and then to appreciate the surprise that is in it.

I. No other evangelist of the four leaves on the mind so terrible a sense of unrelieved gloom in describing the Crucifixion as St. Mark. The last word of Jesus that he records is that terrible word translated "forsaken," and the last sound is that great inarticulate cry, the words of which St. Mark did not know. Other Evangelists soften the description by recording other events and other words at the Crucifixion; but we are looking only at this one authority; we are living, as it were, in the spirit of his description. Accordingly, we feel at once that

when these women, mourning and desolate, came to visit the sepulchre at sunrise on the first day of the week, there was in their minds no thought of a resurrection; their sole idea was to complete the burial which had been hastily performed at nightfall, when the Sabbath began the day before yesterday. And with that curious alertness to practical detail which good women usually show in the midst of trouble, when men's minds are bewildered and disorganised, these women are talking, not, as you would imagine, about their great loss or about their dead Lord, but simply about a practical question: However will they be able to roll away that great stone which they saw Joseph and his servants put before the tomb on that sad evening? How consolatory are the little offices of reverence to the dead; and how heart-soothing to be doing something about the lifeless form, when to sit still with folded hands thinking about the loss would be intolerable! It has come to this with the women—it comes to this with all people in grief—that their sole concern is about that stone! Their pale faces would flush with joy, and their eyes would sparkle, if only they could see some way by

which they could get into the tomb. How natural that is, and how simple! It is just what happens, it is just what no one ever thinks of inventing. And what a beautiful irony of fact it is that we are detained with this tender feminine solicitude just as we are approaching the stupendous event. We pause and think about these three women; there is something homely about their action. It is like a little domestic relief in the midst of great affairs. We come close to them. The first of them, the leader in all these deeds of love, is Mary of Magdala. We cannot tell what is implied in that strange assertion that out of her the Lord had cast seven devils. That is a language of which we have lost the key. But she represents those who love much because they have been much forgiven. He had—this Lord of hers—He had been literally everything to her, the making of her life. You could understand how you would love Him if He had been as much to you. Fortunate woman! Happy in her womanhood, and in her woman's faculty of cleaving with unquestioning devotion to a person—a faculty that has ranked so many women among the truest

Christians and the most eminent saints. The others—Mary, and Salome the wife of Zebedee—are matrons, and might have been His mother, for their own sons were among His disciples. They are the older womanhood, and Mary of Magdala the younger. But all three had been accustomed to follow Him about during His work in Galilee, and to render to Him those gentle and gracious services by which women are able to transform, and to beautify, and to console, and to strengthen the lives of those whom they love. Strange to say, we learn nothing of their character; our attention is entirely fixed upon their womanhood. And well it may be! Well might they be the first at that open tomb, for it was the dawn of a new day for woman.

II. But the stone, great as it was, had been rolled away, and they could walk straight into the rocky chamber without let or hindrance. It was morning, and sunrise is not favourable for ghostly visitations or vapoury imaginings. But as they stepped out of the clear, intense sunlight into the gloom of the rocky chamber, they were fairly taken aback. For sitting on the right-hand side as they entered was a young

man clothed in white, who, a mysterious instinct told them, was not a man of flesh and blood. All who have seen similar apparitions bear their testimony to the unique effect produced upon the mind by them. The apparition seems to be an ordinary human being, is indeed very often one well known and loved, the nearest and dearest friend; but a subtle intuition corrects the impression of the senses, and explains at once that there is something strange in this appearance. As Job put it: "A spirit passed before my face; a form was before my eyes; silence, and I heard a noise." There is, of course, a sense of fear, of awe, an agitation of the spirit; but it is not that agonising terror which you would have expected if it had been told you beforehand. The recipient of these strange communications is immediately attempered to the conditions, passes at once into the unfamiliar atmosphere, and while everything he sees and hears is certain to him as anything that has ever happened in his life, he becomes incredible to other people. Say what he will, they will disbelieve him, and speak about him as if what he states were proof of a mild insanity. It would

be a mistake, therefore, to suppose that this young man arrayed in white was intended to be an evidence of the resurrection for all the world. His testimony was applicable only to those who saw him; and, indeed, we are expressly told in the appendix that even the disciples themselves, who were waiting in tears and sorrow, remembering He had said that He would rise, even the disciples themselves blankly disbelieved the statement of the women (v. 11). You should not be so angry with the sceptic of to-day who does not believe these women; the disciples did not. The evidence of the resurrection is as immediate, as individual, as convincing to you and to me as it was to these women, but their evidence is not what convinces us. This record in its calm, translucent simplicity is simply meant to show how the women were convinced that He had risen.

It is true that the Lord comes and reproaches you and me with our unbelief; He upbraids us as He upbraided these disciples with their hardness of heart, because we never will believe those who have seen the risen Lord, and in our fatuity and stupidity, when a person comes

and assures us on his word of honour he knows that Christ is risen, we call him a fool, and shut ourselves against the evidence. That is why our Lord upbraids us. But He does not blame any one for not believing Mary of Magdala; He blames us because we do not believe the living witnesses, and will not receive their testimony. And as He upbraids us He is Himself so near, so real, so pressing, chiding, rebuking, and convincing, that it is, after all, His Presence which reminds us of our guilt. Yes! I do not ask you to look at what Mary of Magdala saw, I ask you to turn inward for a moment—inward, away from all these outward evidences. Do you ever go inward? Do you ever look into those vast chambers of the inner life? Go inward, and shut the door, and let Conscience light her lamp to illumine the sombre vault, and let the silent voices of your nature speak—the instinct for God, the instinct for immortality, the instinct for righteousness. They are all there in you, though so silent and forgotten; let them speak. Then ask yourselves, Can you seriously doubt that He is risen from the dead and is alive for evermore? It

is the fragmentariness of the record that is always reminding us that we must go inward if we would prove an event like this.

Do I address one who after all stands doubting? Do not, dear, troubled soul, think that I am speaking reproachfully to you. Do not I feel your doubt? You are seeking "Jesus the Nazarene which hath been crucified," and you want with all your heart some assurance of the eternal world. It may be the reason why you want it is that one you loved is just dead, and you wish for the first time to know the way thither. You are seeking, you are turning over books of evidence, and you are looking here and there, expecting to find some material footprints of the Son of Man, hoping to arrest the dead body at least upon the threshold of the tomb. He is not here, He is risen! Go to His disciples; nay, go and be a disciple. Live as a disciple, and you shall see Him as He has promised. No apparition, no voice in the ear, no catena of evidence could ever be so conclusive or so distinct as the witness which the risen Lord gives to the heart of those who are humble and penitent and sincere, and eager to pour the

spices of love and devotion upon Him directly they find Him. You are doubting, and the key of your doubt lies in the chamber of your heart.

* * * * *

III. And now these Cartoons of St. Mark close with this memorable little picture. There are three women hastily leaving the dark cave in the rock. They are seized with tremor and ecstasy. They could not say a word to any one, the emotion is too violent, too transporting. You can see there is a fear upon their faces and in their eyes. Afraid, not of the apparition they saw; afraid, not of the strange and perturbing occurrence; but afraid for this reason, that the great fact has just crashed into their soul like a missile which breaks a rock and opens fountains of unexpected waters. They want to be alone. Do you not know anything of that fear when beings and truths unrealised break in upon you, and you find yourself in the world of yesterday transformed, and the Being you never knew, realised? Do you not know that fear? Then you cannot understand this verse. You cannot expect to understand things you do not know.

But when that fear comes you are like these women, you want to be alone for awhile, you want to recollect, to realise, to grasp this transforming truth: He is not lost, then, though we said "Good-bye." He is not dead, though we buried Him. He is risen, He is passing before us into Galilee, to that familiar Galilee. He is coming back to us in the common daily ways of life. It is not to be a way without Him, but a way with Him, walking by His side, listening to a voice, though not always audible; our eyes fixed on a face, though not always seen.

As that truth—the truth of this Gospel—enters into our hearts we, too, are overwhelmed with the magnitude of the whole matter. We, too, put down the book with fear and trembling. We have studied this marvellous Person from the moment of His first appearance, through all His kindly activity and spiritual teaching, up to that final, that awful cross. Our love and admiration have gone out to Him inevitably. At each point in the narrative we have not been able to resist the feeling that "never did man speak like this man," and never did a life get lived like this life. But if

He were only a tale, a legend, a dream, if the Gospel were only a play of iridescent colours over a decaying past? It has come to this, as we have considered, that the very key to it all is that He should be risen—alive for evermore; that our hearing of His words be attention to a Voice that speaks, and our walking in His steps be a companionship with One that lives. That is the key to it all. And when through a vital experience of the heart, through faith in Him, and the quickening of the Holy Ghost, this scene is given and you know that it is true, what a tremor seizes your heart! You can see, on the faces of those who have known, the solemn awe with which life is lived thenceforth: He is risen and we are risen with Him, for it is all natural and inevitable; “they trembled and were amazed, for they were afraid.”

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